



Aging Out of the Foster Care System to Adulthood: Findings, Challenges, and Recommendations

A report prepared by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Health Policy Institute

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Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc.

December 2007



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A Message From the President

We know little about the more than 20,000 young people who each year “age out” of the foster care systems operated by the 50 states and the territories. One thing we do know is that of those who leave foster care at the age of majority, generally between ages 18 and 21, many do so without benefit of a permanent family placement or long-term relationship with a caring adult. In contrast to their peers who reach the age of majority within a family context, youth who age out of foster care are less likely to have completed high school or earned a GED, and more likely to suffer from mental health problems, be involved in or be victims of crime, and be socially isolated. As adults, these youth also are more likely than their age peers to be unemployed or homeless, and to be living in poverty.

Despite a data collection mandate in the Chafee Foster Care Independence program—the major federal program whose goal is to provide support and services to youth who age out of foster care each year—our knowledge about them and the lives they lead is spotty. While we know that African Americans comprise 32 percent of all youth in foster care – more than double their representation among the population under 18 – we don’t know the representation of African Americans among those who age out of the system each year.

To enhance our knowledge in this area, the Joint Center Health Policy Institute, in collaboration with Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc., conducted reconnaissance on the unmet needs of these youth. With generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we conducted a literature review, a telephone survey, and listening sessions with youth and stakeholders to augment existing information about youth who age out of foster care. The telephone survey was conducted for the Joint Center by Research America, a survey management firm in Philadelphia and captured the knowledge about and perceptions of 800 social workers, on the circumstances that these young people face after they leave the system. The listening sessions were conducted in three cities—Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago—with African American youth (ages 14 to 22 and either currently or formerly in foster care) and with people who identified themselves as stakeholders in the foster care system (for example, child welfare agency staff, substitute parents, and members of community-based and civic organizations). From these listening sessions – which were facilitated small-group discussions with the purpose of eliciting the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants – we gathered insights into the perceptions and the realities of life within the foster care system, the functioning of these systems in three localities, and the struggles that older youth encounter as they face the prospect of life on their own.

The executive summary and the full report synthesize the findings from our research, which we earnestly hope will help ease the transition to adulthood for the youth in our nation’s foster care systems..

We are grateful to Wilhelmina Leigh, senior research associate, and Danielle Huff, research assistant, of the Joint Center staff for preparing this report, to Ernestine F. Jones and Anita Marshall of Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc., and to the other Joint Center staff members who contributed to its preparation, editing, design and publication.

Ralph B. Everett
President and CEO
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

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Executive Summary

To assess and ultimately help meet the needs of youth who age out of foster care in the United States, the Joint Center Health Policy Institute (JCHPI)—with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and in partnership with the Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc. (BACW)—conducted reconnaissance on the unmet needs of these youth. This project was undertaken to guide the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in thinking about steps they might take to help meet the needs of youth who age out of foster care in this country. Conducting a literature review, a telephone survey, and listening sessions enabled us to develop insights into the workings of the foster care system and the experiences of youth while in the system and when aging out of it.

Review of Research and Programs

- < Published research about the youth in and aging out of the nation's foster care system is limited, with less information available for youth aging out of care than for youth in the system. Thus, although certain youth (e.g., African American males, pregnant or parenting youth, youth with juvenile justice system involvement, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender youth, and youth with disabilities) are perceived by many to be the most vulnerable of the youth in foster care, we are unable to examine the particular circumstances of these youth, either while in the foster care system or after having aged out of it.
- < African American youth constituted a nearly equal proportion of the youth entering into (26 percent) and exiting from (28 percent) the foster care system in 2005. Despite this fact, they are overrepresented among the youth in foster care throughout the United States. In 2005, African American youth were 32 percent of all youth in foster care in the United States, but only 15.5 percent of all youth less than 18 years of age in the United States.
- < Compared to other youth in the United States, youth who age out of foster care often enter adulthood less prepared to function indepen-

dently. Youth formerly in foster care are more likely to: not have completed high school or received a GED, suffer from mental health problems, be unemployed, be homeless, be involved in or be victims of crime, rely on public assistance, live in poverty, and be socially isolated.

- < Youth in foster care are at higher risk than other youth of experiencing continuing medical problems, which are exacerbated by the lack of both continuity and recordkeeping for the medical interventions received and by the declining emphasis on preventive measures among adolescents in general.
- < Rates of pregnancy and parenting among youth in foster care are seldom reported. These rates, however, are believed to be higher than among other youth. In addition, the pregnancy rates among African American female youth in foster care have been found to be three times those among their white counterparts.
- < Although the federal government and state governments jointly fund the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) to provide support and services to youth who are aging out of foster care each year, each state configures and administers the set of supports and services provided as part of the CFCIP. Thus, the U.S. foster care system consists of more than 50 different foster care systems—one for each state and for Washington, DC and for the U.S. territories (such as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands).
- < We know little about the independent living services actually received by youth in foster care in each state and how the quality and effectiveness of these services vary. Although the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 that established the CFCIP mandated the collection and reporting of data on outcomes for youth receiving independent living services, this mandate has yet to be implemented.

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Survey Findings

The Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care—a telephone survey of 800 social workers—was conducted by Research America for the JCHPI between February 13, 2007, and April 5, 2007. This random sample of social workers was surveyed to capture their views not only about the youth aging out of foster care but also about the system that serves these youth and the services provided for the substitute parents (foster parents, legal guardians, and relative caregivers) with whom the youth live. The survey responses represent the views and beliefs of the social workers polled about aspects of the foster care system in the geographic areas in which they work.

- < Nearly half (46.5 percent) of the respondents to the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care rated the resources available for the foster care system in their area as either fair or poor—32.4 percent rated them fair, and 14.1 percent rated them poor. Only 11.2 percent rated these resources as excellent.
- < Nearly three-fourths (72.1 percent) of survey respondents said that the major reason underlying their fair or poor assessment of resources for the foster care system was either “too little money” (52.2 percent), or bureaucratic rules (19.9 percent).
- < The proportion of social workers surveyed who rated the scope and benefits of the Chafee program as good (19.4 percent) was comparable to the proportion of social workers who worked in agencies that provided foster care or placement services (25 percent). The proportions who rated the scope and benefits of both the Education and Training Voucher program (28.2 percent) and the Transitional Living program (27.5 percent) as good also were comparable to the proportion who worked in agencies that provided foster care or placement services.
- < A 70-percent majority of the social workers surveyed about the services available to youth *before they age out* of the foster care system believe that their state provides all of the following services: basic life skills building; interpersonal skill building; educational opportunities; job preparation and attainment; anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling; mental health care; physical health care; and help in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or adult interested in maintaining such after the youth leaves the foster care system. Four of every five respondents reported that their states provide all but the last of these services.
- < Although four of every five respondents (80.8 percent) believe that their states provide job preparation and training for youth *before they age out* of foster care, an even larger proportion (a total of 85 percent) believes that unemployment is either a major problem (53.2 percent) or a moderate problem (31.8 percent) for youth *aging out* of foster care.
- < Nearly 90 percent of all survey respondents (88.6 percent exactly) believe that their states provide physical health care and almost as large a proportion (87.4 percent) believes that their state provides mental health care to youth in foster care.
- < A much smaller proportion (52.4 percent), however, believes that most youth have access to health care *when they age out* of the foster care system (at age 18 or older). Even fewer respondents believe that youth formerly in foster care have access to either mental health care (47.7 percent) or to physical health care (41.7 percent).
- < Only 10 percent of the social workers surveyed believe that matched savings accounts are available to youth in the foster care system in the locality where they work.
- < According to survey respondents, the main reasons for the inability of youth in foster care to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult were: behavioral problems (56.8 percent), poor placement (46.8 percent), mental health issues (45.5 percent), family problems (10.6 percent), and gender (i.e., easier for females than for males—8.6 percent).

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- < Survey respondents were less likely to believe that services are provided for youth in foster care who become fathers (37 percent) than they are to believe that any one of the following services—prenatal care and counseling (76.4 percent), parenting skill building (73.4 percent), and child care (62.9 percent)—is provided to pregnant or parenting female youth.
- < More than three of every five of the social workers polled (63.9 percent) believe that their states assist youth *when they age out* of foster care to locate, secure, and maintain transitional housing or permanent housing, or to retain permanent housing with the provision of rental subsidies.
- < When compared to responses about services to youth before aging out, notably fewer survey respondents believe that their states provide the following services to youth *after they age out* of the foster care system: basic life skills training, interpersonal skills development, education and/or job training, physical health care, mental health care, and anti-substance abuse education, information and counseling. Proportions who believe that these services are provided to youth after they have aged out of the system ranged from two of every five (41.7 percent) to more than seven of every ten (72.7 percent).
- < Three of every five survey respondents (60.9 percent) view the placement of youth in multiple foster homes as a major problem. The most frequently cited reasons for multiple placements were: behavioral problems (77.4 percent), poor placement (52.0 percent), and mental health issues (48.2 percent).
- < The most important consequence of multiple placements cited by survey respondents was the lack of attachment/bonding. Lack of attachment/bonding was cited by 29.5 percent of the social workers surveyed, followed by 22.2 percent who cited the lack of stability as the most important consequence.
- < Nearly three of every five survey respondents (57.5 percent) thought that multiple placements/adoption was the single most important reason youth in foster care change schools.
- < Nearly half (46.5 percent) of survey respondents viewed falling behind academically as the most important consequence of changing schools frequently for youth in the foster care system. A lack of stability (11.2 percent) and no lasting friendships (10.6 percent) also were cited as important consequences of changing schools frequently.
- < Nearly half (46 percent) of the social workers polled believe that 20 percent or less of youth in foster care attend college. College attendance of 20 percent is a third of the rate (60 percent) at which all U.S. high school graduates enrolled in colleges between 1990 and 2001.
- < In general, survey respondents believe that the percentage of youth in foster care who have been involved with the juvenile justice system is small. Respondents whose service populations are believed to contain fewer males (0-20 percent male) are more likely to believe that engagement with the juvenile justice system by youth in foster care is limited.
- < Neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure is the main reason offered for why youth in foster care wind up in the juvenile justice system—35 percent cited this reason. An additional fourth (25.2 percent) attribute juvenile justice system involvement to drugs, alcohol, or substance use, and more than a fifth (22.6 percent) associate this involvement with family problems, broken homes, or domestic violence.

Findings from Listening Sessions

The BACW conducted listening sessions with youth and with stakeholders in the foster care system in three cities—Jacksonville, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois. African American youth (ages 14 to 22 and either

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currently or formerly in foster care) and people who identified themselves as stakeholders in the foster care system (e.g., child welfare agency staff, substitute parents, members of community-based and civic organizations) were convened in separate listening sessions. The goal of the listening sessions was to elicit the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants by asking a structured series of questions to gather information about three areas of concern during the transition to adulthood from foster care: community connections and supportive relationships, education and career planning, and life skills preparation. Because of our particular interest in gathering information about the experiences of African American males in foster care, the youth listening sessions included more males (72 total¹) than females (20 total). Both the youth and the stakeholders shared their perspectives and opinions about the systems in their locales.

- < The CFCIP has not been fully implemented around the country. Thus, selected independent living services supported by the CFCIP are not provided to all the youth in foster care who are eligible for them (e.g., Aftercare Support Services and Medicaid until one turns 21 in Florida).
- < Many youth either currently or formerly in foster care in Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago do not feel that they have any real advocates to guide them as they navigate through the foster care system or, later, through life. This was true for some youth in spite of large numbers of interactions with many different adults, including foster parents, relatives, social workers (or caseworkers), and teachers/counselors.
- < Many youth in the Jacksonville listening session complained of receiving no support for career decision-making. Only four of the 29 youth in the Florida listening session were able to identify anyone who helped them with this.
- < Other youth in foster care in the three listening sessions complained of receiving assistance with planning for their futures only after reaching age 17, when it was too late to choose certain careers. In addition, many complained about the failure to receive life skills training

at the earliest permissible age mandated by law and about receiving this training only after turning age 17.

- < Many youth in the three listening sessions complained about being inappropriately placed into special education classes and, therefore, receiving a high-school completion document that limited their future educational and employment options.
- < Stakeholders in the Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago listening sessions felt that there is inadequate accountability for the state and federal dollars spent on the CFCIP and other independent living services.
- < Stakeholders in the Jacksonville listening session believe the number of foster homes is insufficient to meet the demand for placements and that this results in existing foster homes periodically being overcrowded.
- < Stakeholders in the three listening sessions find it problematic that many males within the foster care system (especially African American males) are placed in homes in which no adult males reside and, thus, are reared by single women, largely without positive male role models.
- < Stakeholders in the three listening sessions note the following as the causes of some of the educational challenges encountered by youth in foster care: the lack of collaboration between the education and child welfare systems, and the lack of an education advocate for these youth.
- < Stakeholders in the three listening sessions felt that traditional life skills training as they approach the age of emancipation was inadequate for youth in foster care who are mentally and physically challenged.
- < Youth in the three listening sessions wanted additional funding to be made available both to provide enrichment experiences (such as

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Boy Scouts or cultural activities) for them and to enable them to avoid a placement within the system altogether, if funds were provided to extended family members to take care of them instead.

- < Stakeholders in the three listening sessions are concerned about the fact that placement instability causes some youth in the foster care system to leave it prematurely and, thereby, forfeit the receipt of independent living services to ease their subsequent transition to adulthood.

Summary Recommendations

The overarching recommendations that follow reflect our thinking about steps that could be taken to help address some of the concerns raised in the review of research and programs, the survey, and the listening sessions conducted as part of this project. These recommendations suggest what philanthropic institutions could do to help move us closer to the time when the more than 50 foster care systems in the United States all will function in a manner that enables all youth who age out of these systems to transition to a productive adulthood.

- < Determine the barriers to timely receipt by youth in foster care of needed health services and devise systems to remove these barriers.
- < Explore the current mechanisms and establish more effective mechanisms to provide full information to concerned parties (youth, substitute parents, stakeholders, and caseworkers) about the workings (i.e., programs, resources, and eligibility rules) of the more than 50 foster care systems in the states and territories.
- < Guide/support the development of systems to collect comparable and consistent data for youth of all racial/ethnic groups in the nation's more than 50 foster care systems.
- < Conduct rigorous evaluations of programs that serve youth aging out of foster care to determine which programs work to achieve positive outcomes for youth and to identify the active

ingredients of these effective programs so these ingredients will be retained in program replications and will be included in new generations of programs.

- < Examine and identify successful models for making more durable connections between local child welfare systems and other systems/resources/funding streams (e.g., education, workforce development) that can benefit youth in the foster care system.
- < Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of providing transitional services to children in guardianship care.
- < Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of providing the same supports and stipends to all substitute parents (relative caregivers, guardians, and foster parents) for youth in the foster care system.
- < Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of increasing the involvement of adult males with youth (especially male youth) in foster care.
- < Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of peer support groups or other types of supports (e.g., mentors). Test the utility of these supports against other methods employed to inform and engage youth in foster care and to develop transition plans for youth who are nearing the age of emancipation.
- < Evaluate the effectiveness of different forms of administration and service delivery for foster care systems (e.g., administered by county versus state or city, and service delivery by public versus private agencies).
- < Assess and target interventions to meet the needs of the following vulnerable populations within the foster care systems of our nation: physically and mentally challenged youth, African American males, and pregnant or parenting youth.

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Introduction

In the play “Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune,” by Terrence McNally, the character Johnny states that he and his siblings wound up in foster care after their alcoholic mother left their father, and their father could not cope with raising the children alone. Johnny was eight when he entered foster care. He had numerous foster parents, completed two years of college, served two years in prison for forgery, was married and divorced, overcame a drinking problem, and was working as a short-order cook in a Manhattan diner at age 49.²

The life script of this fictional Johnny is very much like the future that may be experienced by the more than 20,000 youth annually (since the year 2002) who have been emancipated from or have aged out of foster care—at ages between 18 and 21 years—without a permanent family connection.³ Youth who leave the foster care system without this connection are more likely than other youth to be unemployed or underemployed, homeless, without high school diplomas, without adequate health care, without basic life skills, and without the necessary supportive human relationships to sustain them. Although awareness of the unmet needs of this group of newly minted adults is growing, less is known about the specifics of their needs, the barriers to addressing these needs, and the opportunities for improving services to youth as they transition from the foster care system through independent living to responsible adulthood.

To assess and ultimately help meet the needs of youth who age out of foster care, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute (JCHPI)—with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and in partnership with the Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc. (BACW)—conducted surveillance on the unmet needs of youth in the nation’s foster care systems. Using multiple methodologies, the HPI gathered and analyzed information from a diverse set of stakeholders and participants in the foster care systems of our nation to develop recommendations to improve outcomes for the youth who age out of these systems. Because African American youth are over-represented in the nation’s foster care systems—in 2005 they were 32 percent of youth in foster care in the United States⁴ but only 15.5 percent of all youth under the age of 18 in the country⁵—our frame for the analysis was to seek information from stakeholders and participants who repre-

sent this racial/ethnic group. We also chose to emphasize issues among young males who constitute similar proportions of the population in foster care (52 percent⁶) and of youth age 18 or younger (51.2 percent⁷).

The JCHPI and BACW scanned the environment for youth aging out of foster care using the following elements:

- < A review of relevant research and of information about programs that offer services to youth transitioning out of foster care;
- < A telephone survey conducted with a sample of 800 social workers to gather information about local service delivery systems and capacities, as well as the experiences of youth in foster care and of their parent substitutes; and
- < Listening sessions⁸ conducted separately with youth and with stakeholders (e.g., service providers, community leaders, advocates, and elected officials) in three locations (Jacksonville, FL; Houston, TX; and Chicago, IL).

This report summarizes and synthesizes the findings from this project.

Organization of Report

The first chapter provides a review of relevant research and of programs available to meet the needs of the youth in and the youth aging out of foster care. Demographics for the youth in foster care are provided, and challenges for youth leaving the system are discussed (e.g., employment, education, and health care). The major federally supported independent living programs are described, and examples of innovative programs (both federal and with other sponsorship) are briefly mentioned.

The second chapter contains findings from the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care. A brief discussion of survey methodology is followed by descriptions of the respondents’ characteristics and the respondents’ assessment of the demographics of the youth in foster care. The rest of the chapter includes discussions of: the characteristics of the foster care system, services to substitute parents, services to youth of various ages in foster care, and experiences of youth in foster care.

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The third chapter presents the findings from the listening sessions with youth and stakeholders in the foster care system. The initial description of the demographics of the participants in the listening sessions is followed by parallel presentations for each of the sites (Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago). Services available in each site are briefly described, and the discussion from the youth and the stakeholders is summarized. Topics covered in the youth sessions include: community connections and supportive relationships, education and career planning, and life skills preparation. Discussion in the stakeholder sessions focused on system-level issues affecting male youth in the foster care system. Youth and stakeholder recommendations are included in this chapter as well.

The fourth chapter integrates the findings from the review of the research and programs, the survey, and the listening sessions. Recommendations based on the analyses conducted are presented as well.

The appendices contain details related to the methods (review of research and programs, survey, and listening sessions) employed to gain information about the environment for the nation's foster care systems. The methodologies for the telephone survey and for the listening sessions are described in detail. In addition, the state profiles are included here for Florida, Texas, and Illinois, the states in which the listening sessions were conducted. A list of participants in the stakeholder sessions also is included. In addition, the final appendix includes the summary of a listening session conducted in Brooklyn, NY, with four male youth who are in foster care.

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Chapter I Review of Research and Programs

Many studies have documented the importance of family connections and relationships to young people as they move into adulthood.⁹ When a child is removed from his/her biological parent(s) and placed in foster care the government accepts the parental obligation to address the many needs of youth. Having the opportunity to develop life skills, to be prepared to meet their financial needs, and to learn how to take on adult responsibilities are important life lessons that need to be learned to prepare youth to become successful adults. Preparing to become independent and self-sufficient is difficult enough for youth who remain in the care of foster parents but can become an overwhelming experience for those who age out of the system¹⁰ without having the supports needed to be successful.

African American youth are among the more vulnerable populations in foster care because they are overrepresented in the system, remain in the system longer, often experience multiple placements, and often age out of the system without adoption or other enduring family ties.¹¹ Little is known about African American youth in the foster care system or about these youth as they transition from the system.

This review examines some of the issues that youth face as they transition out of foster care, including education and employment, access to health care, and teen pregnancy. First, a snapshot is provided of the youth in foster care—who they are and how they fare in addressing these issues. Next, the major federal programs to meet the needs of youth in foster care are described. This is followed by examples of programs operated to serve youth in foster care around the nation. Although our interest is in African American youth—especially males—in foster care, little of the literature is specific to this population. Thus, the data provided and the literature cited often refer to all youth in foster care.

The Youth In Foster Care

A brief overview of some of the foster care population demographics follows. This overview is taken from the Adoptions and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) preliminary report for FY 2005. As of September 30, 2005, a total of 513,000 children were in foster care. Slightly more than half (more than 52 percent or 269,036

youth) were male, and the rest (243,964 or nearly 48 percent) were female. About a fifth (21 percent or 104,710) were older youth, ages 16-20. Nearly half (more than 48 percent or 247,645 youth) were age 11 or older.

Of the 513,000 youth in foster care, two of every five (41 percent or 208,537) were white non-Hispanic, while nearly a third (32 percent or 166,482) were black non-Hispanic. During fiscal year 2005, black non-Hispanic youth constituted nearly equal shares of the youth entering into and exiting from the foster care system. Twenty-six percent of the youth (80,430 youth) entering the system that year and 28 percent of the youth (81,542) exiting the system that year were black non-Hispanic.¹²

African American children are overrepresented in the foster care system. In other words, a much larger percentage of African American children are in the system (32 percent) than are in the total population of children (15.5 percent) in the United States.¹³ For example, in 2003, the proportions of African American children in foster care in Florida, Illinois, and Texas were more than two, nearly four, and more than two times, respectively, their proportions among all children in those states.¹⁴ “The system’s racial disparity is most apparent in large cities where there are sizeable African American and foster care populations. ... Children of color not only enter foster care at higher rates; they also remain in foster care for longer periods of time.”¹⁵

Of the 513,000 children in foster care in FY 2005, 24 percent (124,153 youth) were living with a relative; 18 percent (94,650 youth) were in a group home or institution; 2 percent (10,930 youth) were runaways; and 1.2 percent (5,918 youth) were in supervised independent living. The rest of the youth lived in pre-adoptive homes (4 percent), were on trial home visit status (4 percent), or lived in foster family homes (non-relative) (46 percent).¹⁶

Since 2002, the number of youth aging out of the foster care system without adoption, reunification, or legal guardianship has increased annually, with more than 20,000 children leaving the system thus each year. The 24,407 youth who aged out of the foster care system in fiscal year 2005 were 9 percent of all the youth who left the system that year.¹⁷ Without proper preparation and connections to services and resources that they may need to transition to a healthy and productive adult life, many youth formerly in foster care become adults with the following characteristics:

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- Had not completed high school or received a GED,
- More often suffer from mental health problems,
- More often involved in crime or are victims of crime,
- More frequently homeless,
- Less likely to be employed than their peers,
- More likely to rely on public assistance,
- Earn, on average, too little to escape poverty,
- If they marry, more likely to have children outside of marriage,
- More likely to have marital problems, and
- More socially isolated¹⁸

Challenges for Youth in Foster Care

Employment and Education

The linkage between employment and education for African American youth in foster care mirrors in many ways this linkage for all African American youth. A survey conducted of caseworkers in Illinois on their opinions about the needs of 416 randomly selected youth who were aging out of (or emancipating from) foster care found that “overall, African American youth were significantly more likely than youth of other races to be unemployed and have difficulties as the result of unemployment.”¹⁹ This same survey also found that urban African American youth were significantly more likely (22%) than non-urban African American youth (5%) to drop out of school.

These urban African American youth in foster care were not, however, significantly more likely than urban youth of other races in foster care (17 percent) to drop out of school.²⁰ This finding is surprising given that urban African American youth are less likely to be employed (or more likely to be unemployed) than other youth in urban areas. The study authors attribute this finding to factors other than preparation for the job market (which school completion or the lack thereof reflects) that might be dominant in the labor

markets of urban areas. Intense competition for low-skill jobs in inner cities (where urban African American are more likely to live) and racial bias in hiring practices are two of the factors suggested to account for this finding.²¹

Health Care

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) notes that

... adolescents in foster care are at higher risk for continuing medical problems, which are exacerbated by multiple placements, lack of continuity of intervention and record keeping, and declining emphasis on preventive measures as they enter adolescence. Adolescents in foster care report feeling low levels of trust in adults and the service system which may prevent their accessing health care and other services.²²

Indeed, accessing care for mental health problems has been identified as the number one unmet health care need.

Few studies document the health status of youth exiting from foster care, but a number document the health problems among youth when they enter the foster care system. One review of these studies found, for example, that “more than 12% of adolescents entering foster care in San Francisco tested positive for tuberculosis.” In Vermont, “86 [percent of youth] were sexually active [and therefore] at risk for a wide variety of problems.” Youth in foster care ages 12 – 17 “accounted for 49 [percent of the] users of mental health services rendered to children under age 18 years through Medi-Cal (California’s Medicaid program) in 1988.”²³ An analysis of Medicaid records in southwestern Pennsylvania for FY 1995 found that children (ages 5-17) in foster care were 3 to 10 times as likely as children in the Aid to Families with Dependent children program to receive a mental health diagnosis and were 7.5 times as likely to be hospitalized for a mental health condition.²⁴ These findings point out a persistent barrier to health care for youth in foster care that needs to be addressed as they move into adulthood so they will be able to avoid an adult life with more severe and overwhelming health problems.

Teenage Pregnancy

Attention must still be given to the continuing high incidence of teen pregnancy among youth in the child welfare system. “The rate of teen pregnancy within the child welfare

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system is of particular concern, as young people living in foster care or kinship care are prone to higher rates of risky behaviors, including earlier age of first intercourse, greater numbers of sexual partners and earlier age of first pregnancy than their peers not in foster care.²⁵ Pregnant and parenting teens have the added burden of trying to raise a child without a support system. Leathers and Testa (2006) found that “African American young women were three times [as] likely to be pregnant and parenting [as] white young women.”²⁶ The failure to address this is compounded because teen pregnancy affects both the teen parent and the child/children. Teen mothers and their children are more likely to live in poverty and to be subjected to the negative consequences.

Federal Foster Care Programs

The United States Congress acknowledged the need to prepare young people who are transitioning out of foster care for adult independence by including in the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985—passed in 1986—language to amend the Social Security Act and establish the Title IV-E Independent Living Program. Thirteen years later (in 1999), to address the growing need for independent living services, the Foster Care Independence Act (known as the Chafee Act) was enacted, creating the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). The CFCIP replaced the title IV-E Independent Living Program and broadened the scope of transitional support. Subsequently, in 2001, the Chafee legislation was amended to include the Education and Training Voucher Program (to provide funds to youth in foster care for higher education). These programs—along with Medicaid program and SCHIP for health insurance coverage—provide funding for education, housing, health care, and life skills development to youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Another program—the Transitional Living Program—provides residential services for runaway and homeless youth ages 16-21, many of whom are also in the foster care system. Each of these support programs that serves youth in foster care is described briefly below. **(See Appendix A for details about how these programs are implemented in three states—Florida, Texas, and Illinois.)**

Title IV-E Independent Living Program

Section Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides entitlement²⁷ funds to states for the costs of maintaining certain eligible children in foster care. States are subject to match-

ing requirements based on their Medicaid matching rate. In fiscal year 2005, the federal government spent \$4.9 billion on all the programs under section Title IV-E.²⁸

The Title IV-E Independent Living Program (ILP) makes funding available to help states provide services to youth who are likely to remain in foster care until age 18, as well as to youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who formerly were in foster care. Originally authorized in 1986 (P.L. 99-272), the ILP was permanently authorized as a part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-66), which also increased the program funding level from \$45 million (FY 1987) to \$70 million (FY 1994).²⁹ In fiscal year 2005, federal program funding for this program was \$140 million.³⁰

Funding from the ILP can be used for services to youth ages 16 and 17 (i.e., until the youth reached age 18) who are deemed likely to remain in foster care until age 18, as well as to youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who used to be in foster care. Services generally include education assistance (e.g., assisting youth in completing high school or acquiring a GED, or attending vocational school), finding and maintaining employment, training in daily living skills such as budgeting, and finding and maintaining housing. Counseling and providing and coordinating other services and assistance for youth transitioning to independent living also can be supported by ILP dollars.³¹

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP)

The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P. L. 106-169) established the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) to replace the Title IV-E Independent Living Program. Unlike the Independent Living Program, the CFCIP allows states to provide services to youth under age 16 and allows youth to retain assets valued up to \$10,000. State governments provide a 20-percent match for federal CFCIP funding. This match is achieved via federal reimbursement of 80 percent of state expenditures for eligible uses under the program.

Funding from the CFCIP may be used for the following: mental health services, life skills training, mentoring, employment and educational services, and stipends for housing. Youth deemed likely to remain in care until age 18 are eligible for CFCIP services, as are those who age out of foster care at any point before age 21. The CFCIP also

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allows states to extend Medicaid coverage to youth who are in foster care or youth who have aged out of foster care until they turn 21. Postsecondary training and education for youth who have aged out of foster care or who were adopted after age 16 through public adoption agencies also is included in CFCIP provisions.³²

All states are required to submit a plan to the federal government stating how they would administer, supervise, or oversee the CFCIP. The general requirements involve assurances that there would be statewide accessibility, objectivity in the criteria being used, fairness and equity, and cooperation in national evaluations that would be conducted. There is, however, encouragement for the states to be innovative and to involve youth in the design and development of the programs. While every state has implemented portions of these statutes, implementation has been subjected to interpretation and state-level focus and funding. (See Chart 1³³ below.)

Federal allotments to states of CFCIP funds (i.e., the maximum amount for which states can be reimbursed by the federal government for independent living services) are based on the proportion of all youth in foster care in each state in the most recent fiscal year out of the total number of children in foster care in the United States for the same fiscal year.³⁴ Chart 2 (see right) shows FY 2006 and FY 2007 federal allocations to states for the CFCIP. The annual total federal allocation remains \$137,900,000. Between 2006 and 2007, fewer states received an increase in funding than received either a decreased amount or the same amount of funding.

The Department of Health and Human Services has sought public comment on a regulation that requires states to collect and report data on youth who are receiving independent living services and on the outcomes of certain youth who are in foster care or who age out of foster care. Once issued, this rule would establish a mechanism for accountability of states in implementing these services, the final provision of the Chafee Act to be implemented.³⁵

CHART 1: PROVISIONS OF THE JOHN H. CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

Provision	John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program
Amount	\$140 million capped entitlement
State match	20% match required on total allocation
Allocation formula	Based on the proportion of children in both Title IV-E-funded and state-funded foster care in their state for the most recent fiscal year. In any year, no state shall receive less than \$500,000, or its 1998 allotment under the Independent Living Program, whichever is greater.
Set – Aside	15% of the authorized program funds are set aside for evaluation, technical assistance, performance measurement, and data collection.
Eligible young people	Young people up to age 21 who are “likely to remain in foster care until age 18” and those who have aged out of foster care, without regards to their eligibility for Title IV-E-funded foster care. A portion must be used to serve eligible young people who left foster care because they reached age 18.
Participation of young people in the program	Young people must participate directly in designing their program activities and accept personal responsibility for achieving independence.
Funding for services to young people ages 18 to 21	States must use a portion of their funds for assistance and services for young people 18 to 21 who left foster care because they reached age 18.
Use of funds for room and board	States may use up to 30% of their program funds for room and board for young people ages 18 to 21, who left foster care at age 18.
Health Care	States are given the option to extend Medicaid coverage to young people ages 18 to 21 who were in foster care on their 18th birthday, or to some subset of this group.
Asset limit	CFCIP changed the asset limit to allow young people to have \$10,000 in assets and remain eligible for Title IV-E-funded foster care.
Evaluation	Secretary of HHS must develop outcome measures and data elements to track state performance on outcomes and penalties for states that do not report.

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CHART 2: FEDERAL ALLOCATIONS TO STATES – CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

State	FY 2006 ³⁶	FY 2007 ³⁷		State	FY 2006	FY 2007
Alabama	\$ 1,631,326	\$ 1,784,444		Montana	521,839	573,562
Alaska	500,000	500,000		Nebraska	1,617,445	1,608,401
Arizona	2,344,164	2,600,648		Nevada	917,975	1,205,461
Arkansas	796,126	833,756		New Hampshire	500,000	500,000
California	23,738,286	20,953,350		New Jersey	3,425,888	3,108,387
Colorado	2,106,894	2,120,011		New Mexico	596,388	591,373
Connecticut	1,748,804	1,815,162		New York	11,585,958	11,585,958
Delaware	500,000	500,000		North Carolina	2,590,431	2,761,462
District of Columbia	1,091,992	1,091,992		North Dakota	500,000	500,000
Florida	7,419,887	7,566,271		Ohio	4,628,175	4,502,283
Georgia	3,654,418	3,604,768		Oklahoma	2,707,909	2,965,641
Hawaii	759,109	713,984		Oregon	2,595,316	2,844,837
Idaho	500,000	500,000		Pennsylvania	5,641,006	5,599,072
Illinois	5,123,537	5,015,701		Puerto Rico	1,820,526	1,751,663
Indiana	2,505,086	2,905,756		Rhode Island	620,552	647,646
Iowa	1,384,031	1,753,727		South Carolina	1,248,044	1,227,919
Kansas	1,557,806	1,506,181		South Dakota	500,000	500,000
Kentucky	1,799,446	1,880,984		Tennessee	2,465,241	2,327,548
Louisiana	1,358,131	1,358,131		Texas	6,305,516	7,455,535
Maine	702,298	596,019		Utah	541,890	589,825
Maryland	2,856,235	2,805,086		Vermont	500,000	500,000
Massachusetts	3,230,262	3,160,529		Virginia	1,765,770	1,812,581
Michigan	5,491,138	5,291,124		Washington	2,408,173	2,598,840
Minnesota	1,809,215	1,801,223		West Virginia	1,025,684	1,117,956
Mississippi	746,770	843,823		Wisconsin	2,008,182	2,093,167
Missouri	3,007,131	2,928,213		Wyoming	500,000	500,000
				TOTAL	137,900,000	137,900,000

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

In 2002, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments of 2001 (PL 107-133) modified the CFCIP by creating a new grant program for states to provide education and training vouchers. The new program—called the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program—serves youth aging

out of foster care and youth adopted from foster care at age 16 or older. The ETV program makes funds available to youth formerly in foster care to apply toward the cost of attending an accredited institution of higher education. The amount of these awards is determined by the financial need of the youth and by the amount of ETV funds allocated to the state. Youth can continue to receive funds until age

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23, if they were in the program at age 21. This legislation provided the following:

- Vouchers may be available for the cost of attendance at an institution of higher education as defined in Section 102 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and shall not exceed the lesser of either \$5,000 per year or the total cost of attendance, as defined in section 472 of the Act. (Section 472 specifies how need is defined for student financial assistance.)
- Amount of the voucher shall be disregarded for the purpose of determining the recipient's eligibility for, or the amount of, any federal or federally supported assistance except as defined in section 472 of the Higher Education Act of 1965.³⁸
- Under the voucher program youth adopted from foster care after attaining age 16 may be considered to be youth otherwise eligible for services under the State program.
- States may allow youth participating in the voucher program on the date they attain 21 years of age to remain eligible until they attain 23 years of age, as long as they are enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program and are making satisfactory progress towards completion.

Transitional Living Program

The federal government has funded programs to serve runaway and homeless youth since 1975, when the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act was passed (as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974). Although this Act—through the Transitional Living Program—provided emergency services to meet the immediate needs of youth in foster care and their families and to promote reunification, the Transitional Living Program that operates today was created in 1988 by the 1988 Amendments to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.³⁹ One stipulation of this legislation was that states had to agree to deinstitutionalize status offenders (youth who were guilty of truancy or running away). Prior to this time most services for runaway youth were provided by communities and local social service agencies and organizations.

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)⁴⁰ funded the first Transitional Living Programs in 1990. In 1999, the Missing, Exploited, and Runaway Children Protection Act (P.L. 106-71) was enacted. This law consolidated into a single funding stream the monies for several programs, including the programs for Transitional Living for Homeless Youth, and for Runaway and Homeless Youth, and the Drug Education and Prevention for Runaway and Homeless Youth program.⁴¹

The Transitional Living Program provides residential services for homeless youth ages 16 -21 for up to 18 months, with an additional 180 days for youth who are younger than 18 years. The intent of this program is to help homeless youth transition into self-sufficiency. The program operators are required to provide youth with a safe and stable living arrangement and with services to help them to move into independence. Living arrangements may be agency-owned apartment buildings or scattered site apartments (single-occupancy apartments rented directly by young people with support from the agency). The Transitional Living Programs “also provide pregnant or parenting youth with parenting skills, including child development, family budgeting, health and nutrition, and other skills to promote their long-term economic independence. . . .”⁴² The focus of these services is to help youth build skills, develop leadership abilities, and become involved in their communities. The following services are included under this legislation:

- “Basic life-skills building, including consumer education and instruction in budgeting, using credit, housekeeping, menu planning, food preparation, and parenting skills
- Interpersonal skill building, including enhancing young people’s abilities to establish positive relationships with peers and adults, make decisions, and manage stress
- Educational opportunities, such as GED preparation, postsecondary training, or vocational education
- Assistance in job preparation and attainment, such as career counseling and job placement
- Education, information, and counseling to prevent, treat, and reduce substance abuse

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- Mental health care, including individual and group counseling
- Physical health care, including routine physicals, health assessments, and emergency treatment⁴³

Today, the FYSB funds the Transitional Living Program through the Runaway, Homeless, and Missing Children Protection Act of 2003, as amended by P.L. 108-96. Funds for the Transitional Living Programs are made available through grants which are competitively awarded and reviewed by peer panels. Grants can be made for up to 5 years. In FY 2006, \$36.0 million in funding was given to 193 organizations that serve homeless, missing, and exploited children. This funding also supports the Presidential initiative that created maternity group homes, transitional living programs for young mothers and their children.⁴⁴

Health Care

Medicaid, the publicly funded health insurance program for the low-income and disabled, was established in 1965 as a joint federal-state program for which states provide a match for federal dollars. Minimum standards including eligibility and benefits are established by the federal government, while the states administer the program. The CFCIP provided states the option to extend Medicaid coverage to youth ages 18 through 20 who have aged out of foster care. As of fall 2006, seventeen states have taken advantage of this provision (known as the “Chafee option”) to extend health coverage for youth until they turn 21. Five additional states are planning to implement the Chafee option, and the remaining 28 states and the District of Columbia offer Medicaid coverage to youth in foster care through other laws and provisions.⁴⁵

The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), established as a part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, also provides health insurance for children and adolescents (on the basis of their family income) for which youth in foster care are eligible. States are permitted to use their SCHIP funds in one of three ways: expanding Medicaid, establishing a state-designed or separate SCHIP program, or a combination of these two approaches. As of June 2006, 14 states (including the District of Columbia) had implemented a Medicaid expansion SCHIP program; 17 states had implemented a state-designed SCHIP program; and 17 states had implemented a combination SCHIP program.⁴⁶

In general, states that design their SCHIP programs make their program available to families at higher income levels. Under the SCHIP program states can be flexible in the consideration of income, assets and resources, or they could simplify the application process. States also can establish presumptive eligibility for enrollment, based on the assertion of “qualified entities” (e.g., schools, agencies that administer the WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) program, and health care providers) that the children appear eligible.⁴⁷

Examples of Foster Care Programs Around the Country

The problems that many youth in foster care encounter en route to independence often challenge traditional service providers because these challenges defy remediation with the usual services administered in the usual way. Thus, to meet the needs of youth aging out of foster care, innovative programs based on different philosophies or approaches should be considered and applied as appropriate.

This section features selected programs that provide services to youth. Although not meant to be a comprehensive review of youth-serving programs nationwide, these programs represent a variety of innovative approaches. Some of the programs were not developed specifically for children in foster care, and none have been rigorously evaluated for their effectiveness with this population. All the programs, however, accept referrals from child welfare agencies and thus can serve youth in foster care.

Achieving Independence Center of Philadelphia

The Achieving Independence Center (AIC) is a one-stop center under the auspices of the Philadelphia Department of Human Service’s Office of Community Family Support. Opened in December 2002, the Center is designed to provide to young people who are transitioning out of foster care the following supports: educational services (to help youth succeed in high school or to go to college), employment services, hands-on training, housing, life skills, and access to technology. The Center uses the resources of other Philadelphia-based organizations to offer a range of services that meet the needs of youth transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency. The AIC serves youth between 16 and 21 years who were in foster care on their 16th birthday. It uses a membership model where eligible youth can maintain a membership from age 16 through 21.

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The AIC offers services during non-traditional hours with flexible scheduling, provides on-site job training, and is dedicated to providing real life tools for youth.⁴⁸ For example, the Independence Café at the AIC is a fully operating Euro-style café serving the general public that is operated by the Goodwill Industries of Southern New Jersey and Quaker City. Youth receive hands-on training at the café by working alongside Chef Trainers, preparing food, providing customer service, operating cash registers, and maintaining a sanitary and professional retail environment.⁴⁹ In addition to basic employment skills training, this program exposes participants to what is involved in employment in the retail and service industries, as well as the skills needed to manage a business.

Alternative Schools Network

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) collaborates with the Alternative Schools Network to serve Chicago-area youth who are out-of-school and do not have a high school diploma or GED. The Network has established 15 community-based alternative high schools for DCFS. In each school a teacher and mentor work closely with students under the jurisdiction of the DCFS to monitor their academic achievement, personal development, and supportive services. A total of 256 students were served in FY 2006. All these schools offer year-round academic programs, after-school enrichment, full-time school-based mentors, and a scholarship program for postsecondary education.⁵⁰

California Chafee ETV eBus

The Chafee ETV eBus is a mobile outreach program for all ETV-eligible youth in foster care. "The eBus is a 40-foot retrofitted mobile computer lab, equipped with two-way Internet connectivity via satellite."⁵¹ Its purposes are to increase awareness of the Chafee ETV (Education and Training Voucher) program and to provide educational, financial, and community resources to the youth in a more personalized format. The eBus provides a three-hour workshop with guest speakers. Youth have the opportunity to use 13 workstations to apply on-line for grants or admissions to colleges and vocational schools. Youth also are given a resource bag with information covered in the workshop; bilingual resource materials and Spanish speaking staff are available as well. In addition, mentoring is provided during

open research time, and an on-site resource library is available on the bus.

DFPS and the Texas Workforce Commission partnership

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Texas Workforce Commission partnership is focused on helping youth obtain job skills, training, and employment through local workforce development boards. Strategies include communicating with the boards to ensure that young adults ages 18 to 25 receive services through the appropriate Welfare-to-Work funding. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two entities was signed in May 2006, with the Workforce Commission designating youth aging out of foster care as a priority population for employment-related services. Cross training for staff of the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program and the Workforce Commission also is a part of the agreement.⁵²

One tangible result of this partnership has been the receipt of federal funding to establish the Houston Alumni and Youth Services Center (or HAY Center). At this transition center (or one-stop center) at one site youth are able to do all of the following: complete GED certification, receive PAL services, take a community college preparatory course, talk to the onsite apartment locator service, and receive employment training and placement services. The transition centers provide another service for foster youth becoming adults; they offer the opportunity for youth to develop personal and community connections. Transition centers exist in other parts of Texas.⁵³ (See the description of the Transition Resource Action Center for information about another transition center in Texas, developed using a somewhat different model.)

Educational Access Project

The Educational Access Project is a partnership between the Illinois DCFS and Northern Illinois University to provide educational advisors and technical assistance on behalf of any youth in foster care in the state of Illinois (or adopted through the Illinois DCFS) who experiences problems while in the educational system. The Educational Access Project provides educational advocacy training to foster parents and for the staffs of DCFS, schools, courts, and private child welfare agencies. Additionally, the Educational Access Project monitors and follows up on any educational problems identified for children in DCFS Administrative Case Reviews.⁵⁴

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Family Support Services of North Florida

The Family Support Services of North Florida is the lead agency in Duval County (home of the City of Jacksonville) for providing services to youth in out-of-home care. In 2006, a total of 2,070 children were in out-of-home care in Duval County. This includes 1,661 African American youth, with 485 of these youth fifteen years and older. The Independent Living Department of Family Support Services works with youth up to age 22 years. The Independent Living services are designed to help youth in foster care become proficient in daily living activities such as money management, employment skills, food preparation, and other vital skills required for adulthood.⁵⁵ The agency also provides assistance and support services to youth who need access to funds to meet their educational needs including support for high school and college, short-term help with housing, and aftercare support.

First Place Fund - California East Bay Area

The First Place Fund for Youth is a micro-lending and housing program for youth formerly in foster care. First Place Fund has helped about 310 youth formerly in foster care to live for up to two years in safe, affordable apartment units scattered around the East Bay. "About 85 percent of the program's graduates have continued to live in stable housing, sometimes in the same units, after the fund's services ended."⁵⁶ Each youth in the program must take part in four to six hours of support services each week, including instruction in basic life skills, how to look for employment, how to obtain medical care if needed, and how to meet their educational needs. Youth formerly in foster care can participate in the program until age 23. It is not unusual for the youth to be homeless when they come into the program. Initially the program was funded with private donations and grants from foundations, but, as of October 2003, the First Place Fund began to receive money through the state Transitional Housing Placement Program. In addition to Alameda County in the East Bay, the First Place Fund provides matching funds to Contra Costa and San Mateo counties to enable them to develop similar housing programs for foster children in their jurisdictions. Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, Kern, and Lassen counties in other parts of the state are expected to participate in the program in the near future.

Hawaii Youth Circles and Foster Youth Coalition

In Hawaii, the Department of Human Services (DHS) purchases its Independent Living Services through services contracts. Services include individualized assessments and service planning based on the youth's needs, strengths and goals. The four contractual providers are Hale Kipa (for the island of Oahu), Salvation Army Hilo Interim Home (for the island of Hawaii), Maui Youth & Family Services (for the islands of Maui, Molokai, and Lanai), and Child & Family Services (for the island of Kauai). While their focus is on assisting youth with job placement, completing high school, budgeting, and making connections with community resources, the Hawaii DHS seeks to actively engage youth in the development of the services. Youth Circles and the Foster Youth Coalition are two key programs that address the Chafee mandate for youth to be involved in the development of transitional services to meet their needs.

Hawaii Youth Circles are family mediation services that began in April 2004 to give youth a voice in planning for their future. It allows them to bring together important people and services to support them in developing a transitional plan. A youth may have more than one circle, for example, with one used before and another used after the youth leaves foster care.⁵⁷

The Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition is:

... a youth led and run organization providing a voice for youth currently and formerly in foster care. This organization is the youth advisory board for the CWSB [Child Welfare Services Branch]. Their active components include youth helping youth (networking and support), developing youth leadership, youth advocacy, testifying at the legislature, and youth advisors to the system. [The] DHS provides funding for an executive director as well as funds and programmatic support for Coalition activities, including board meetings, conferences and other activities designed to facilitate the development of the youth.⁵⁸

The Coalition has lead responsibility for planning an annual conference held each year during the Spring break that brings youth currently and formerly in the foster care system together to discuss transition issues along with other interests.

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Illinois Child Welfare Network

The Illinois Child Welfare Network provides services to youth in Illinois through several private agencies. Selected programs are briefly described below.

Children's Home offers a supervised independent living program to youth ages 16 to 20 in Central Illinois. The program has two phases: The Transitional Living Phase (TLP) and the Independent Living Phase (ILP). The TLP provides daily workshops to teach the initial and more intense independent living pro-social skills such as the skills needed to seek and maintain employment, budget, plan meals, and use community resources. Residents are provided individual and group clinical sessions. Each resident shares a house with other residents, pays rent and has 24-hour supervision. In the ILP, youth sign apartment leases, begin to pay bills, and continue individual and group counseling.⁵⁹

Jane Addams Hull House New Directions program "provides a wide range of supportive services to youth between the ages of 19 and 20 who are wards of the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services. The program secures housing for youth in apartments throughout the city and nearby suburbs. Primary services include counseling, case management, and advocacy."⁶⁰ The program also provides life skills training, job readiness classes, tutoring, therapeutic recreation, and exposure to social and cultural activities, as well as training and guidance for pregnant and/or parenting teens. A documentary on the "Aging Out" experience of one participant (Thomas) in the Hull House program has been created.⁶¹ This story chronicles the many challenges that one African American male encountered in his journey to reach adulthood.

Kelley's Home is another program operated by Hull House. It is a residential transitional living program of the Department of Children and Family Services that serves 20 older youth. Each apartment in Kelley's Home is shared by two youth, who are provided 24-hour supervision, counseling, life skills classes, health care, employment preparation, educational advocacy, and social and recreational pursuits.⁶²

Teen Living Programs (TLP) has served underprivileged youth in Chicago since 1975. The mission of TLP "is to create hope and opportunity for youth who are homeless by assisting them to permanently leave the streets, secure

stable housing and build self-sufficient, satisfying lives."⁶³ Its services include community and street outreach, access to a health care clinic, emergency shelter for runaways, a group transitional residence, and individual long-term apartments. Youth are provided educational and vocational assistance, counseling and psychiatric services, daily living skills training, and workshops to equip them with the information and resources needed to live "independent and fruitful lives."

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

Partnerships in communities (e.g., Atlanta, Georgia; Denver, Colorado; Des Moines, Iowa; Detroit & 10 Michigan Counties; Hartford & Bridgeport, Connecticut; State of Maine; Nashville, Tennessee; Providence, Rhode Island; and San Diego, California⁶⁴) across the nation are using The Opportunity Passport initiative to organize

... resources to create financial, educational, vocational, health care, entrepreneurial, and recreational opportunities for youth who are leaving or have recently left foster care. The goals are to help young people leaving foster care to: become financially literate; gain experience with the banking system; amass assets for education, housing, health care, and a few other specified expenses; and gain streamlined entry to educational, training, and vocational opportunities.⁶⁵

A key element in this program is the involvement of local organizations and agencies and the direct involvement of youth in the planning and implementation of the program.

La Verne Adolfo Housing Program

This program is a transitional and permanent housing program in Sacramento, California, started in 2001 by the Great Start Emancipation Collaborative, a coalition constituted by county agencies, Volunteers of America, Casey Family Programs, Lutheran Social Services, and other community organizations. This residential program, managed by Volunteers of America, houses 20 youth formerly in foster care in two leased houses and in a leased apartment complex. It has received support from private donations and from several federal programs (Welfare-to-Work, HOME, and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program). The permanent housing program, managed by

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Lutheran Social Services, houses in privately owned apartments 12 youth with disabilities who have aged out of the foster care system.⁶⁶

New York Section 8 Priority Code

The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Office of Housing Policy and Development, in cooperation with the New York City Housing Authority have implemented a Section 8 Priority Code for children aging out of the foster care system. Under this code, Section 8 vouchers or public housing units are made available to qualified current and former clients of the ACS Independent Living program. This program also has offered units of permanent supportive housing to former clients with mental health needs.⁶⁷

North Carolina Links

The North Carolina Links program is available to older youth and young adults who have spent extended time in foster care and, therefore, may be at increased risk of negative consequences once they leave care. This program seeks to avoid outcomes such as dropping out of school, unplanned parenthood, high rates of untreated illness, homelessness, criminal activity, depression and suicide.⁶⁸ This program provides services to all youth in foster care age 16 to 18 and to youth ages 18 to 21 who are voluntarily in care, as well as to young adults who aged out of foster care at age 18. The youth or young adult must be a willing and active participant in the assessment, planning and service implementation processes.⁶⁹ Links provides money to youth from their: Trust Funds; Transitional Housing Funds (up to \$1,000 per year); High Risk Funds; and Scholarship/Conference Funds. The Trust Funds can be tapped to cover college expenses and living expenses other than rent, such as furniture or utility deposits. The High Risk Funds can be used by youth determined to be at high risk of not achieving the program's goals. The Scholarship/Conference Funds can be tapped for money to attend conferences or to support youth to remain in school.

Transition Resource Action Center

The Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) is a "centralized assessment/intake and referral center for transitional living services for youth exiting foster and juvenile care in North Texas."⁷⁰ The entities that partner to create the TRAC use a small core coordinating staff plus some

staff from collaborating agencies to leverage resources and create a one-stop-shop to serve these youth. In a single location, the TRAC offers intensive planning and wrap-around services along with case management for youth exiting the foster and juvenile justice systems. Youth between the ages of 14 and 24 receive supportive services from the community, government, and private agencies to enable them to transition to self-sufficiency. The TRAC has a college representative, a vocational coordinator, and other staff to help youth specifically with job search, financial aid for college or training, preparation of resumes, and mentoring (if needed). (See also the description of DFPS and the Texas Workforce Commission Partnership for information about another transition center in Texas.)

YMCA Black Achievers Program of Cleveland, Ohio

The YMCA Black Achievers Program began in Houston, TX, in 1967. Cleveland, Ohio became an affiliate of the program in 2004. The goal of the Cleveland program is "to support and encourage minority youth in the areas of academics, career exploration and leadership development."⁷¹ In Ohio, only 40 percent of African American students graduate from high school, with this figure only 33 percent in Cleveland. Leadership development is an important aspect of the program. Students "learn how to effectively plan, manage meetings, raise funds, and carry themselves as leaders among their peers."⁷² Youth-adult partnering occurs in every aspect of the programming, such as career cluster meetings, self-esteem seminars, forums and academic workshops." Youth actively recruit new members and are instrumental in leading the activities.

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Chapter II Survey Findings

In the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care social workers were polled to assess their views of the foster care systems in the localities in which they worked. Although the survey focused on youth aging out of the foster care system, the questionnaire sought to capture the views of social workers not only about the youth themselves but also about the system that serves them and the services provided for the substitute parents (foster parents, legal guardians, and relative caregivers) with whom the youth live.

Using the questionnaire developed by the Joint Center, Research America Inc. (a survey management firm in Philadelphia) conducted telephone interviews with 800 social workers between February 13, 2007, and April 5, 2007. The respondents were randomly selected from a sampling frame of 18,000 social workers. After the initial call, at least eight “call-backs” were made to complete an interview. The survey completion rate was 65 percent, a rate that is generally viewed as quite high for telephone surveys. The average length of each interview was 25 minutes.

Since the survey sample was drawn from a list of 18,000 social workers, the generalizability of the results depends on two factors: (1) the extent to which that list captures the experiences of all social workers and (2) the knowledge among social workers about the foster care systems in the United States. The sampling frame is fairly large relative to the sample, so that if we assume the sampling frame approximates the larger population of social workers in the United States, the results of this survey can be interpreted with a statistical margin of error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

Characteristics of Respondents

The social workers surveyed represent all regions of the country. They serve youth from urban and rural areas alike, and work in a variety of professional settings. Nearly a fourth (24.1 percent) worked in the Northeast, while the largest share worked in the Midwest (32.8 percent, nearly a third). About 30 percent worked in the South, and the remaining 13.2 percent worked in the West (Figure 1). Most survey respondents worked for organizations that provide foster care to youth primarily from urban areas (40.1 percent). The other respondents serve youth primarily from rural areas (21 percent), small towns (20 percent), and

suburban areas (12.6 percent) (Figure 2). The majority (69 percent) of survey respondents worked in private agencies, with 31 percent in public agencies.

The employing organizations of the social workers in the survey provide a long list of services, including (but not limited to) foster care or placement services, mentoring, case management, daycare programs, food/meal assistance, transportation, help to families seeking licensing to house youth who are in foster care, and recreation programs or camps. All survey respondents did not work in organizations that provided foster care or placement services, however. Only a fourth (25 percent) worked in organizations that provided these types of services, a fact that may explain the lack of knowledge about particular aspects of the foster care system reported in response to selected survey questions. The other two services provided most frequently by the organizations in which survey respondents worked were mental health services (10.1 percent) and counseling (9.5 percent).

The majority of survey respondents (61.5 percent) reported that in their areas the state administers foster care. An additional 35.1 percent of respondents reported that the county administers foster care, and 17.2 percent think that it was locally administered.⁷³ Regardless of the level of government that provided the foster care, about two-thirds of respondents (65.9 percent) said that both public and private agencies jointly provided services to the youth in the foster care system (Figure 3). Nearly a fourth of social workers (24.1 percent) indicated that public agencies alone provided the services, and one of every ten (10 percent) reported that private agencies alone provided foster care services.

In subsequent sections, survey findings are presented for groups of respondents defined by some of the characteristics noted above. Differences by type of respondent are presented whenever the gap between a given response and the response for the entire sample is large enough to be statistically significant. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings presented.

Assessment of Demographics of Youth in Foster Care

The social workers surveyed assessed the gender and racial/ethnic characteristics of the youth served by the foster care systems in their areas. A third of respondents thought that in their areas, the population of youth served by the foster care system was between 41 percent and 50

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percent male. An additional 12 percent of respondents said that the population of youth in foster care in their area was between 51 percent and 60 percent male. Thus, nearly half of the survey respondents perceived that males were about half of the youth in the foster care systems where they worked (Figure 4). The assessment by survey respondents of the proportion of males in foster care is equivalent to the 52 percent of youth in foster care identified as male as of September 30, 2005.⁷⁴

When asked about the race/ethnicity of the youth served by their local foster care systems, almost seven of every ten respondents (69.1 percent) indicated that their systems served youth belonging to a variety of racial/ethnic groups. More than a fifth (21.4 percent) replied that the youth in foster care in their area were mostly white. Only 7.5 percent of the social workers replied that the youth in foster care in their area were mainly black, and 2.0 percent replied that these youth were mainly Hispanic (Figure 5).

The social workers surveyed reported predictable differences in the race/ethnicity of youth in foster care, based on the areas from which the youth served originate. For example, respondents whose organizations work with youth mainly from urban and suburban areas were less likely (than all respondents) to say that the youth served by foster care were mainly white (only 10.3 percent for urban areas and 12.9 percent for suburban areas), and more likely to say they belonged to a variety of racial/ethnic groups (75.7 percent for urban areas and 79.2 percent for suburban areas). Respondents whose organizations provide foster care to youth primarily from small towns and rural areas, however, were more likely to say that they served mainly white youth (31.9 percent for small towns, and 39.9 percent for rural areas), and less likely to say they served youth of a variety of racial/ethnic groups (62.5 percent for small towns, and 53.6 percent for rural areas).

When asked to specify the three most important differences between black and white youth in foster care, the social workers most frequently responded that they did not know (50.5 percent). The largest proportions of respondents offered the following differences in the circumstances of youth as the major difference between black and white youth in foster care: 18.4 percent cited fewer black foster homes, and 17.5 percent cited more white placements and homes. Almost one of every eight social workers polled suggested cultural differences associated with blacks in white foster homes (12.2 percent) and more moves for black children

(12 percent) as the major difference between black and white youth in foster care (Figure 6).

Assessment of System Characteristics

When queried about the amount of resources available for the foster care system in their area, nearly half of the survey respondents rated them as fair or poor, while a full 50 percent rated them as good or excellent. A total of 46.5 percent rated the amount of resources as either fair (32.4 percent) or poor (14.1 percent). On the other hand, nearly two-fifths (38.8 percent) rated the resources as good, but only 11.2 percent rated them as excellent (Figure 7).

Social workers who assessed the resources in their local foster care system as either fair or poor were asked the major reason for their responses. Nearly three-fourths (72.1 percent) said that the major reason underlying their assessment was either too little money (52.2 percent) or bureaucratic rules (19.9 percent). Other respondents (7.3 percent) offered limited services as the reason for their reply. Interestingly, reasons given for the fair or poor ratings differ for respondents in the entire sample and their counterparts in areas where the county is responsible for foster care. Respondents in areas where the county is responsible for foster care (41.2 percent) were less likely than the entire sample (52.2 percent) to attribute their responses to too little money. Social workers who reported that foster care services in their area were provided by private agencies, on the other hand, were more likely (63.4 percent) than either the entire sample (52.2 percent) or respondents in areas where the county provides services (41.2 percent) to cite too little money as the explanation. This suggests that places in which the county implements foster care may be perceived as more generous than other places in funding the system.

In addition, differences exist among subgroups of these respondents on the contribution of bureaucratic rules to the resource challenges faced by the foster care system in their area. Although only one of every five (19.9 percent) respondents attributed their fair or poor rating to bureaucratic rules, nearly 30 percent of these respondents who worked in the following types of areas attributed their fair or poor resource rating to bureaucratic rules: social workers in areas believed to provide different services to relative caregivers and to foster parents (28.9 percent) and social workers who believe the areas in which they work do not assist youth aging out of foster care to acquire housing (28.4 percent).

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Survey respondents had little knowledge about the scope and quality of benefits provided by the following federal foster care programs: John F. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, and the Transitional Living Program. Perhaps as a reflection of the fact that only a fourth (25.1 percent) of the social workers polled indicated that the organization for which they worked provided foster care/placement, the largest response to queries about the scope and quality of these three programs was “don’t know.” More than three-fifths (62.5 percent) of respondents indicated that they did not know about the Chafee program, and nearly half responded that they did not know about the ETV Program (49.4 percent) or about the Transitional Living Program (47.5 percent). Nearly a fifth of survey respondents (19.4 percent), however, rated the scope and quality of benefits of the Chafee program as good, as did more than a fourth (28.2 percent) of respondents when asked about the ETV Program and about the Transitional Living Program (27.5 percent) (Table 1).

Assessment of Services to Substitute Parents

Regardless of their structure or form of administration, foster care systems provide services both to youth in need of protection and to the adults—legal guardians, relative caregivers, and foster parents—who offer a safe haven for these youth by becoming substitute parents. On the whole, the social workers who participated in the Joint Center Survey had limited knowledge about the services provided to parent substitutes.

Nearly half (49 percent) of all survey respondents indicated that they did not know the services provided to foster parents caring for youth aging out of the foster care system in their state. An additional 18 percent of the social workers surveyed believe that parenting classes and training are provided to foster parents along with financial counseling/assistance/support/training (13.6 percent).

When comparing legal guardians to foster parents, more social workers believe that these two types of substitute parents receive the same services than believe that they do not. In fact, two-fifths (40.5 percent) of survey respondents believe that legal guardians and foster parents caring for youth aging out of foster care receive the same services, while nearly a fifth (18.4 percent) do not believe this. The remaining 41.1 percent of respondents did not know whether this was true. Respondents in areas where youth

in foster care were mostly suburban were significantly more likely (26.7 percent) than the entire survey sample (18.4 percent) to think that legal guardians and foster parents do not receive the same services.

When queried about the nature of the differences between services received by legal guardians and foster parents, three major ones were noted by respondents who don’t think that these two parent substitutes receive the same services. A fourth (25.2 percent) of respondents believe that legal guardians (but not foster parents) are assumed to have the means to incorporate additional youth into their families without financial assistance. More than a fifth (21.1 percent) of respondents cited the fact that legal guardians receive no stipend as a major difference between legal guardians and foster parents. A fourth (23.8 percent) also believe that legal guardians get fewer support services than do foster parents. Among social workers throughout the United States, those in the Midwest (34 percent) are more likely to believe that legal guardians get fewer support services than foster parents. Overall, at least a fifth of the social workers surveyed believe that legal guardians receive less support (financial and otherwise) than do foster parents.

When comparing relative caregivers to foster parents, a larger proportion of all survey respondents believe that relative caregivers for youth aging out of the foster care system get comparable services to those received by foster parents (than though so when comparing legal guardians to foster parents). More than two-fifths (45.2 percent) of respondents believe that relative caregivers and foster parents get the same services, greater than both the 38.6 percent who do not know whether they do and the 16.1 percent who think they do not get the same services. Interestingly, respondents who believe that their jurisdictions provide the same services to relative caregivers as to foster parents are even more likely to believe that legal guardians and foster parents also receive the same services—75.7 percent of this subgroup of respondents believe this, while 12.7 percent think it is not true, and 11.6 percent do not know.

When asked about differences between services received by relative caregivers and foster parents, both of whom are caring for youth aging out of foster care, there were two main responses. Nearly half of respondents (47.3 percent) believe that relative caregivers get little or no support/subsidies, and 44.2 percent do not know what the differences are between services received by these two groups. More

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than one in eight respondents (13.2 percent) mentioned the lack of training for relatives as a difference between relative caregivers and foster parents. One in every 13 respondents (7.8 percent) mentioned the fact that licensing is not required for relative caregivers, and nearly 1 of every 15 respondents (6.2 percent) cited the lack of respite care for relatives as a difference between relative caregivers and foster parents.

Assessment of Services to Youth in Foster Care

The Joint Center Survey included several questions to elicit from the sample of social workers their perceptions of how the foster care system in their area works and the nature of the rules governing this system. Issues examined included the maximum age for youth in foster care and whether youth can be readmitted to the foster care system if they voluntarily leave before this age. Respondents also were queried about the nature of the services provided and issues that have resulted from the implementation of various rules in the foster care system. The survey probed differences among services to youth before they age out, when they age out, and after they have aged out. Services to pregnant and parenting youth in foster care are discussed separately at the end of this section because they cut across the different age groups and statuses within the foster care system.

General System Rules and Operation

A majority of respondents (61.4 percent) believe that their state maintains youth in foster care beyond age 18. Respondents who work for public organizations were significantly less likely (52.4 percent)—and respondents in areas where most youth in foster care were suburban were significantly more likely (68.3 percent)—to hold this belief. Slightly less than a third of all respondents (29.8 percent) believe that their state does not maintain youth in foster care beyond age 18, with the remaining 8.9 percent responding “don’t know” (Table 2).

Social workers who indicate their belief that their state maintains youth in foster care beyond age 18 were subsequently asked up to what age their states maintain youth in foster care. Nearly three-fourths (71.7 percent) replied “age 21,” with an additional 10 percent (9.6 percent, to be exact) replying “age 19” (Figure 8). Several groups of respondents

were significantly more likely than the entire sample to reply age 21—those in areas that serve mainly small town youth (78.9 percent); those in the Northeast (78.6 percent); and those in the South (80.5 percent). Respondents who live in the Midwest (64.6 percent) were significantly less likely to believe that their state maintains youth in foster care until age 21. These perceptions of regional differences are consistent with available data about the ages to which youth are maintained in foster care. Available data for 2006 reveal that 77.8 percent of states in the Northeast and 91.6 percent of states in the South maintain youth in foster care until at least age 21.⁷⁵ Only 60 percent of Midwestern states retain youth in foster care until age 21.⁷⁶

Respondents who thought that their states provide foster care to youth beyond 18 years of age identified five main requirements for receipt of these services (Figure 9). More than two-thirds (68 percent) stated that completing secondary education was a prerequisite for services beyond age 18. Roughly equal proportions of respondents cited special needs (emotional, mental, physical) (44.6 percent), vocational training (40.9 percent), and post-secondary education (40.1 percent). Enrolling in Job Corps was mentioned by 28.7 percent of social workers surveyed as one of the requirements for youth to continue receiving foster care services from their state.

Although there is great variation in this view, half of all respondents (50.4 percent) believe that their state will readmit to the foster care system youth who voluntarily leave it before age 18. A fifth (21.5 percent) don’t believe this, and 28.1 percent don’t know whether this is true. Three-fifths of the respondents in the Northeast (60.1 percent) and of respondents whose organizations provide foster care to a population that is 51-60 percent male (60.0 percent), however, believe that their states will readmit to foster care youth who voluntarily leave the system before age 18. In contrast, though, less than a third (31.0 percent) of the social workers whose organizations serve a mostly male (81-100 percent) youth population believe that their states will readmit to foster care youth who voluntarily leave the system before aging out.

The respondents to the Joint Center Survey had little knowledge of the services available to youth who leave the foster care system before age 18 without an approved placement. When queried about this, nearly half (48.8 percent) re-

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sponded “don’t know”; an additional 11.1 percent responded “none.” Nearly one in every 12 respondents thought that their states provided independent living arrangements (8.2 percent) or housing/shelters (8.1 percent).

Services Available to Youth in Foster Care

Like other youth, young people in foster care need to develop certain skills and receive certain services to be able to function competently as adults. These skills include education and/or job training, basic life skills, and interpersonal skills, and necessary services include physical and mental health care. The Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care asked respondents whether their states provide selected skills training and services to youth either before they age out (i.e., before age 18 or 19 or 21), at the time that they age out, or after they age out of the system.

Before Aging Out

Respondents were asked if their organizations provided the following services to youth in foster care before they aged out of the system: basic life skills building; interpersonal skill building; educational opportunities; job preparation and attainment; anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling; mental health care; physical health care; and help in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or other adult interested in maintaining such a relationship after the youth leaves the foster care system. At least 70 percent of all survey respondents believe that their state provides all the services listed above. Four of every five respondents reported that their states provide all services except help in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or other adult interested in maintaining such a relationship after the youth leaves the foster care system (Table 3).

Eighty-five percent (84.9 percent) of the survey respondents believe that their states provide basic life-skills training to youth before they age out of the foster care system. This includes such skills as housekeeping, budgeting, managing a checking account, and planning and preparing meals. A similar proportion (83.2 percent) of all the social workers polled believe that their states provide interpersonal skill building training. Almost three-fourths (72.4 percent) of survey respondents think that their state helps older youth in foster care identify and establish a relationship with a relative or other adult interested in maintaining such a relationship after the youth leaves the foster care system.

Respondents living in the West (61.3 percent) were less likely than all survey respondents to report that this relationship development service was provided to the youth in foster care in their region.

Large proportions of respondents reported that their states provide educational opportunities (86.9 percent) and job preparation and attainment (80.8 percent) for youth before they age out of the foster care system. The only significant exception to this was the smaller (but still majority) proportion among the subgroup of respondents who believe that their states do not assist youth aging out of foster care with housing; 67.1 percent of this subgroup believes that their states provide job preparation and attainment for youth before they age out of the foster care system.

Most survey respondents also generally believe that their states provide health care and related services to youth before they age out of foster care. More than seven of every eight respondents (88.6 percent) believe their states provide physical health care to youth before they age out of foster care. Virtually the same proportion (87.4 percent) believes their states provide mental health care. A somewhat lower proportion (82.1 percent) believes that their states provide anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling to youth before they age out of foster care. Among social workers who think their state does not provide assistance finding housing to youth aging out of foster care, an even smaller (but still majority) proportion (71.7 percent) reports the same view about anti-substance abuse interventions.

When Youth Age Out

Housing. More than three of every five social workers polled (63.9 percent) believe that their state assists youth aging out of foster care to locate, secure, and maintain transitional housing or permanent housing, or to retain permanent housing with the provision of rental subsidies. Respondents who believe their states do not maintain youth in foster care beyond age 18 (56.3 percent) and respondents who believe that their states do not provide services to youth after they age out of the foster care system (55.6 percent) are less likely than all respondents to believe that their states provide housing assistance to youth when they age out of the foster care system.

The social workers surveyed report more knowledge about the provision of assistance in locating and maintaining

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housing to youth leaving foster care than about the proportion of youth who become homeless when they age out of the foster care system. The largest proportion of social worker respondents (37.2 percent) reported that they do not know the percent of youth who become homeless when they age out of the system. Nearly one in every six respondents (16.2 percent) estimated this percent as between 1 percent and 10 percent, while one in ten respondents (10.5 percent) estimated this share as 21-30 percent, and about one in 12 (8.2 percent) estimated it as 11-20 percent.

Few respondents (only 29 percent) also indicated that they knew of any state initiatives to end homelessness among youth aging out of foster care. The only subgroup of respondents significantly more likely to say that they knew of initiatives to avert or eliminate homelessness among youth aging out of foster care worked in the West (37.7 percent, nearly two of every five).

Job Training/Employment. Although four of every five respondents (80.8 percent) believe that their states provide job preparation and training for youth before they age out of the foster care system (Table 3), an even larger proportion (a total of 85 percent) believes that unemployment is either a major problem (53.2 percent), or a moderate problem (31.8 percent) for youth aging out of the foster care system (Figure 10). Only five percent thought that unemployment was not a problem at all for youth aging out of the system.

Survey respondents were not likely to know of efforts by their states to help unemployed youth who are in the process of aging out of foster care (43.9 percent). Around a fifth of respondents believe that their states provide job placement or employment services (21.8 percent), or job/vocational training (22 percent) for unemployed youth aging out of the system.

Matched Savings Accounts. Few respondents believe that matched savings accounts⁷⁷ are made available by their states to youth in the foster care system who worked. Only 9.9 percent of social workers surveyed believe this, while half (50.5 percent) do not believe it, and two of every five (39.6 percent) replied that they “did not know whether their states did or not.”

When those who believe that their states provide matched savings accounts for youth in foster care were asked the percent of youth in foster care who took advantage of the matched savings accounts, more than a third (36.7 percent)

stated they did not know. An additional 15.2 percent placed this percent in the 1-10 percent range, and 10.1 percent put it in the 11-20 percent range. Respondents reported a comparable level of uncertainty about the barriers that keep youth in the foster care system from participating in the matched savings program. Nearly two-fifths (39.2 percent) did not know the barriers that keep youth in foster care from participating in the matched savings programs available for their use. About one in six (16.5 percent) cited not knowing that the program was available as a barrier. About 15 percent cited the lack of employment and the lack of money both as barriers. Yet another group—including 13.9 percent of the survey respondents—cited not being motivated to stay in the savings program as a barrier.

Access to Health Care. Although nearly 90 percent of all survey respondents (88.6 percent) believe their states provide physical health care and almost as large a proportion (87.4 percent) believes their states provide mental health care to youth in foster care (Table 3), a much smaller proportion thinks that most youth who age out of foster care have access to health care. Slightly more than half (52.4 percent) of the social workers polled believe that youth who age out of the foster care system have access to health care.

When asked their opinion of why youth who age out of foster care do not have access to health care, about a fourth of respondents indicated it was because the youth do not qualify once they age out (24.4 percent) (Figure 11). Almost as many (23.6 percent) replied they did not know why this was so. An additional 15 percent of respondents think this occurs because the youth formerly in foster care are not aware of the benefits available to them. About one in every eight respondents believes that youth who age out of foster care do not have access to health care because they are unable to afford it (12.6 percent), or because the system/state does not provide health care services (12.9 percent).

Permanent Connection to Others. When asked whether their states help older youth identify and establish a relationship with a relative or adult interested in maintaining such a relationship after the youth ages out of foster care, nearly three-fourths (72.4 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they thought so (Table 3). However, when survey respondents were asked to indicate the percent of youth aging out of foster care who have this type of permanent connection with family or a trusted adult, only 12.8

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percent provided a response that fell between 71 percent and 80 percent. Nearly 10 percent thought that 21-30 percent of youth had this connection. Fifteen percent reported an answer between 41 percent and 50 percent, while nearly a fourth (23.1 percent) responded “don’t know”.

The main reasons offered for the inability of youth to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult were: behavioral problems (56.8 percent), poor placement (46.8 percent), mental health issues (45.5 percent), family problems (10.6 percent), and gender (i.e., being easier for females than for males) (8.6 percent) (Figure 12). Respondents in the West (64.2 percent) and respondents whose organizations provide foster care to populations that are 21-40 percent male (66.7 percent) are significantly more likely than the entire sample (56.8 percent) to attribute the inability to establish this type of connection to behavioral problems. Although respondents whose organizations provide foster care mainly to rural youth, however, view behavioral problems as the main explanation (48.8 percent), the proportion holding this view is less than that among the entire sample.

Among the social workers polled, one group was significantly more likely than the entire sample (46.8 percent) to cite poor placement as the explanation for the lack of connection between youth leaving foster care and a family member or other adult. Social workers who work in the West were more likely (53.8 percent) to attribute this lack of connection to poor placements.

After They Have Aged Out of Foster Care

Few respondents believe that their states provide services to youth after they age out of foster care. Overall, fewer than half (43.5 percent) believe that their states provide any of the following services to youth after they age out of the foster care system: basic life skills training, interpersonal skills development, education and/or job training, physical health care, mental health care, and anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling. Nearly a third (32.1 percent) believe that their state does not provide any of the services, and almost a fourth (24.4 percent) responded that they did not know. Numerous subgroups of the social workers polled, however, were either more likely or less likely than the entire sample to report that their state provides some of the abovementioned services to youth after they age out of foster care, as the numbers below indicate.

The proportions of respondents who believe that their states provide the various services (noted above) to youth after they age out of foster care varied considerably by type of service. While nearly three-fourths (72.7 percent) believe their states provide educational opportunities and basic life skills training (71.3 percent) for youth after they age out of foster care, many fewer respondents believe that their states provide physical health care (41.7 percent), mental health care (47.7 percent), and anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling (53.7 percent). In between these extremes, we find respondents who believe their states provide assistance with job preparation and attainment (64.4 percent) and with interpersonal skill building (59.8 percent) (Table 3). Interestingly, respondents in the Northeast are less likely than the entire sample to believe their states provide each of these individual services to youth after they age out of foster care, but equally likely (or more likely) to believe that their states provide all of these services.

Services to Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Foster Care

About three-fourths of all survey respondents believe that pregnant or parenting youth in foster care receive prenatal care and counseling (76.4 percent) and parenting skills building (73.4 percent). A smaller majority (62.9 percent) believes that childcare also is provided to these youth. The only respondents less likely to believe that these three services are provided to pregnant and parenting teens are those whose organizations provide foster care to populations believed to be largely (81-100 percent) male. Among this subgroup of respondents, 54.8 percent believe that prenatal care and counseling are provided, and 59.5 percent believe that parenting skills building is provided. About two-fifths (42.9 percent) believe that childcare was offered, also less than for the sample overall. The respondents most likely to believe that all three services are provided to pregnant and parenting youth in foster care are those who believe that their states provide services to youth after they age out of foster care. Eighty-five percent of these respondents believe their states provide prenatal care and counseling to pregnant or parenting youth, and 81.9 percent believe that parenting skill building is provided. Nearly three of every four (73.9 percent) believe that child care is made available.

When queried about whether pregnant or parenting youth can remain in foster care, more than seven of every ten social workers (71.2 percent) responded that they do not

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believe that pregnant youth or youth who are parents are forced to leave the foster care system before the age at which other youth leave. Only 6.8 percent believe that pregnant or parenting youth are forced to leave foster care at a younger age than are other youth. More than one in every five social workers polled (22.0 percent) did not know the answer to this question

About half (49.8 percent) of survey respondents believe that pregnant or parenting youth qualify for independent living before age 18. More than a fifth (22.1 percent), however, do not believe that pregnant or parenting youth qualify for independent living before age 18.

Survey respondents are less likely to believe that services are provided for youth in foster care who become fathers (37 percent) than they are to believe that any one of these three services—prenatal care and counseling (76.4 percent), parenting skill building (73.4 percent), and childcare (62.9 percent)—is provided to pregnant or parenting female teens. The proportion of survey respondents who do not know whether services are provided for youth in foster care who become fathers (34.5 percent) nearly equals the proportion who believe that fathers in foster care get services (37 percent).

Respondents believe that services provided to youth in foster care who become fathers include: parenting skills classes/fatherhood training (59.8 percent), counseling (11.8 percent), and job/skill training or vocational training (12.8 percent). When comparing subgroups of respondents with the entire sample, a significant difference was found only for respondents in the Northeast (24.1 percent), who are nearly twice as likely as all respondents (12.8 percent) to believe that job/skill training or vocational training is provided to youth in foster care who become fathers.

More than half of respondents (52.4 percent) believe that their state has a plan for children born to youth in foster care. Nearly a third (30.5 percent), however, responded that they “Don’t Know,” and 17.1 percent believe that their state lacks such a plan. Many subgroups of respondents were significantly less likely than the sample overall to believe that their states have such a plan. Respondents in the Midwest (45.4 percent) and West (43.4 percent) were less likely to answer “Yes” to this question, as were respondents who believe that their states do not provide housing assistance to youth aging out of foster care (40.1 percent).

Assessment of Experiences of Youth in Foster Care

Some think of foster care as a system that moves the youth in its care among numerous placements with the associated impact on the number of schools attended and ultimately on the educational attainment of the youth. In the minds of many, spending time in the foster care system also is associated with spending time in the juvenile justice system—because many youth have dual experiences. Others believe the foster care system is the recipient of many youth who have been runaways. The social workers interviewed for the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care share this general assessment of the foster care experience.

Multiple Placements

When queried about the placement of youth in the foster care system in multiple foster homes or other settings, three of every five respondents (60.9 percent) viewed this as a major problem (Figure 13). One subgroup of respondents—those in the West (75.5 percent)—is even more likely to view multiple placements as a major problem. Less than five percent (4.6 percent) of all respondents would say that multiple placements are not a problem at all, while a fourth (25.9 percent) classify it as a moderate problem, and less than 10 percent (8.6 percent) label it a minor problem.

Among the many reasons suggested by social workers for multiple placements for many youth in foster care, the most frequently cited reason was behavioral problems (77.4 percent), followed by poor placement (52.0 percent), and then by mental health issues (48.2 percent).

When asked to select the most important consequence of multiple placements, the most frequent response was the lack of attachment/bonding. Nearly a third of all respondents (29.5 percent)—and nearly two-fifths of respondents in the West (37.7 percent)—cited this as the main consequence. More than a fifth (22.2 percent) of all survey respondents cited “a lack of stability” as the most important consequence of multiple placements. The third largest proportion of respondents (13.6 percent) stated that they could not identify the most important consequence of multiple placements.

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School Placements and Educational Attainment

Attending school is the core of a child's life, no less so if the youth is in foster care. Because frequent school changes are thought of as a hallmark of being in the foster care system, the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care featured a series of questions about school changes and educational attainment.

The largest proportions (nearly a fifth) of survey respondents think that on average youth in foster care change schools three times (19.9 percent hold this view), or stated that they did not know how often youth in foster care changed schools (19.2 percent).

Not surprisingly, most survey respondents (three-fourths or 75.7 percent) believe that multiple placements/adoption is among the *top three reasons* why youth in foster care change schools. Nearly two of every five respondents (38.6 percent) mentioned behavior problems, and 15 percent included school issues (such as grades and truancy) among the three main reasons for school changes.⁷⁸ There was some variation in the shares among subgroups of respondents who viewed these as the three main reasons that youth in foster care change schools. For example, respondents in the West (24.5 percent) are more likely than the entire sample (15.0 percent) to cite school issues as a reason for school change.

When asked to identify the *single most important reason* youth in foster care change schools, multiple placements/adoption was the top reason, given by 57.5 percent of survey respondents. Another 11.8 percent cited behavior problems as the major reason, while 15.5 percent indicated that they did not know the single most important reason. Only 3 percent of respondents offered school issues/grades/truancy as the single most important reason youth in foster care change schools, and all other reasons were given by less than 2 percent of the sample.

The most important consequence for youth in foster care who frequently change schools is "falling behind academically"; nearly half (46.5 percent) mentioned this consequence. "A lack of stability" was cited as the most important consequence by 11.2 percent of the social workers polled, while "no lasting friendships" was cited by an additional 10.6 percent.

Few survey respondents believe that there is a difference between white and black youth in foster care in the likelihood of changing schools frequently. Almost seven of every eight respondents (87.1 percent) believe there is no difference by race in the frequency of school changes. Only 10 percent believe that white youth in foster care are less likely to change schools than black youth, and about three percent believe that white youth in foster care are more likely to frequently change schools.

Responses to questions about completing high school, or getting a GED, and about attending college are consistent with the top ranking of "falling behind academically" as the most important consequence for youth in foster care of frequently changing schools. Only 6 percent of respondents believe that nearly all youth (91-100 percent) in foster care either graduate from high school or receive a GED (Figure 14). Though a fourth of respondents said they did not know the share of youth in foster care who complete high school or earn a GED, the second largest response category was 71-80 percent of youth, capturing 17.2 percent of responses. An additional 13.2 percent believe that between 41 percent and 50 percent of youth in foster care are high school graduates or GED holders. Respondents whose organizations provide foster care to youth mainly from small towns (25.6 percent) are significantly more likely than all respondents (17.2 percent) to believe that between 71 percent and 80 percent of youth in foster care either graduate from high school or receive a GED.

Half of the social workers polled in the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care (50.6 percent) see no difference between white and black youth in the foster care system in their likelihood of either graduating from high school or earning a GED. Another 26.9 percent do not know if there is a difference, and nearly a fifth (18.8 percent) believe that white youth in foster care are more likely to graduate from high school or earn a GED.

Two subgroups of respondents are more likely than the entire sample (18.8 percent) to believe that white youth are more likely than black youth to complete high school or earn a GED: respondents whose organizations provide foster care mainly to black youth (30.0 percent), and respondents whose organizations provide foster care to a population that is 51-60 percent male (26.3 percent). These subgroups' views may be based on survey respondents' knowledge of general patterns (but not the actual rates) of high school or GED completion. In October 2005,

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among persons ages 18-24, black non-Hispanic youth (85.9 percent) were less likely than white non-Hispanic youth (92.3 percent) to have completed high school or received a GED.⁷⁹ Similarly, males (85.4 percent) were less likely than females (89.8 percent) to have done so.

The views about “falling behind academically” also are consistent with perceptions of survey respondents about the percent of youth in foster care who attend college. Nearly a third (32.2 percent) of the social workers polled replied that only 1-10 percent of youth in foster care attend college. Other sizable percentages of the social workers polled believe that 11-20 percent of youth in foster care attend college (13.8 percent), and that 21-30 percent of the youth in foster care do so (12.5 percent) (Figure 15). These views are consistent with the findings from an analysis of the educational attainment of youth in foster care that was completed by the Institute for Higher Education Policy. About 20 percent of youth in foster care who graduate from high school attend college.⁸⁰ This is a third of the rate of about 60 percent of all high school graduates in the United States who enrolled in college between 1990 and 2001.

Respondents of four types are more likely than all respondents (32.2 percent) to believe that 10 percent or fewer of all youth in foster care attend college:

- those who believe their states do not provide services to youth after they age out of foster care (39.3 percent),
- those who believe their states do not offer the same services to relative caregivers and foster parents (46.5 percent),
- those in states that do not offer assistance in acquiring housing to youth who age out of foster care (40.8 percent), and
- those who work in the Midwest (41.6 percent).

Only respondents who work in the Northeast are less likely (24.4 percent) than the entire sample (32.2 percent) to believe that the proportion of youth in foster care who attend college is between 1 percent and 10 percent.

Survey responses about college attendance seem to be correlated with the proportion of males believed to be in foster care. This correlation is neither strictly increasing nor

strictly decreasing, however. If the relationship were strictly increasing, the percent of youth in foster care who are believed to attend college would increase as the percent of males increases. If the relationship were strictly decreasing, the percent of youth in foster care who are believed to attend college would decrease as the percent of males increases.

This correlation between college attendance and the proportion of males believed to be in foster care is exemplified by two different groups of social workers who believe that the percent of youth in foster care who attend college is low—between 11 percent and 20 percent. In particular, respondents who perceive that the youth population for whom their organization provides foster care is either 21-40 percent male, or 51-60 percent male are almost equally likely to think that the percent attending college is between 11 percent and 20 percent—20.2 percent and 22.1 percent for the two groups of social workers, respectively. These two groups of social workers also are more likely than the entire sample (13.8 percent) to believe that 11-20 percent of youth in foster care attend college. Similarly, respondents who work for organizations that serve youth populations in foster care who are 21-40 percent male also are about equally likely to believe that a somewhat higher percent of youth in foster care (21-30 percent) attend college, as they are to believe that 11-20 percent of youth in foster care attend college. In particular, more than a fifth (22.6 percent) of social workers in organizations serving a foster care population that is 21-40 percent male believe that 21-30 percent of the youth in foster care attend college, a greater proportion than among all the social workers polled in the Joint Center Survey.

Social workers who think their agencies provide foster care to youth who are mostly female (i.e., 0-20 percent male or 81-100 percent female), however, are much less likely to think that 21-30 percent of the population in foster care served by their employer attend college (6.1 percent) than are social workers whose service populations include more males. Less than five percent of survey respondents in each of the categories representing the percent males believe that 31 percent or more of youth in foster care attend college, with only 0.4 percent of respondents believing that between 91 percent and 100 percent of these youth so matriculate.

When asked if white youth in foster care were more likely to attend college than their black counterparts, more than two

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of every five respondents (43 percent) did not think there was a difference by race. An additional third (32.4 percent) said they did not know. About a fifth (21.1 percent), however, responded that they thought white youth in foster care were more likely than black youth in the system to attend college. Another subgroup of respondents—those who believe that the youth population for whom their organizations provide foster care is 51-60 percent male—is more likely (35.8 percent) than the entire sample (21.1 percent) to believe that white youth in foster care are more likely to attend college than black youth in the system.

Only 3.5 percent thought that white youth in foster care were less likely than black youth in foster care to attend college. One subgroup of respondents was less likely than the entire sample (21.1 percent), however, to think that white youth in foster care were more likely than black youth in foster care to attend college. This group was social workers who believe that their organizations provide foster care primarily to suburban youth, only 13.9 percent of whom believe that white youth in foster care were more likely than black youth in foster care to attend college.

Juvenile Justice System

Many believe that youth in foster care are more likely than other youth to be involved with the juvenile justice system.⁸¹ In general, though, respondents to the Joint Center Survey did not believe that large percentages of youth in foster care have been involved with the juvenile justice system. About one in seven respondents (14.5 percent) estimated that between 1 percent and 10 percent have been involved with juvenile justice system. Smaller shares of respondents believe that between 11 percent and 20 percent of youth in foster care have juvenile justice system involvement (10.5 percent) and that between 21 percent and 30 percent do as well (11.2 percent). Slightly fewer respondents believe that no youth in foster care are involved with the juvenile justice system (9.2 percent) or that between 41 percent and 50 percent of these youth are so involved (8.9 percent). The largest proportion of respondents (18.1 percent) indicated that they did not know what share of youth in foster care had such involvement (Figure 16).

The estimated proportion of males in the population to whom foster care is provided by one's agency seems to be correlated with the perception of involvement with the juvenile justice system by youth in foster care. For example, respondents whose organizations provide foster care to a

population that contains few males (i.e., an estimated 0-20 percent male, or 80-100 percent female) are significantly more likely than the entire sample (14.5 percent) to believe that only between 1 percent and 10 percent of youth in foster care also have been involved with the juvenile justice system (23.2 percent). In addition, social workers who believe that their organizations provide foster care to a population that is less than half male (21-40 percent male) are significantly more likely than the entire sample (10.5 percent) to believe that between 11 percent and 20 percent of the youth in foster care also have had juvenile justice system involvement (19.0 percent).

When asked for three main reasons that youth in foster care become involved with the juvenile justice system, a total of 20 different responses were provided. More than a third of respondents (35 percent) cited neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure as the reason for juvenile justice system involvement (Figure 17). Respondents whose organizations provide foster care to youth who are mainly suburban are even more likely (44.8 percent) than the entire sample (35 percent) to attribute this involvement to neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure. An additional fourth of all respondents (25.2 percent) attributed juvenile justice system involvement to drugs, alcohol, or substance use. More than a fifth (22.6 percent) associated the juvenile justice system involvement of youth in foster care with family problems, broken homes, or domestic violence. Nearly 16 percent attributed the juvenile justice system involvement generally to the behavior of the youth, while one of every eight (12.8 percent) cite theft, robbery, or crime as the cause of this involvement.⁸²

As with other issues, perceptions of the proportions of males in the youth service population are correlated with perceptions of the reasons underlying juvenile justice system involvement. For example, respondents who believe their organizations provide foster care to a population that is 21-40 percent male are significantly more likely (34.7 percent) than the entire sample (25.2 percent) to believe that this involvement is associated with drugs, alcohol, or substance use. Similarly, social workers who believe that their organizations provide foster care to a population that is 51-60 percent male are significantly more likely than the entire sample to believe that the juvenile justice system involvement is associated with theft, robbery, or crime (20 percent v. 12.8 percent of entire sample) and also significantly more likely to believe that this involvement is associated with behavior (25.6 percent v. 15.6 percent of the

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entire sample). In addition, respondents who believe that their organizations provide foster care to a population that is 61-80 percent male are significantly more likely than the entire sample to believe that the involvement of youth in foster care with the juvenile justice system emanates from family problems, broken homes, or domestic violence (31.1 percent v. 22.6 percent of the entire sample).

A few significant differences by region are noted in responses about the *three main reasons* that youth in foster care become involved with the juvenile justice system. For instance, social workers in the Northeast are significantly less likely than the entire sample to associate juvenile justice system involvement with drugs, alcohol, or substance use (17.9 percent v. 25.2 percent for the entire sample) or with neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure (27.7 percent v. 35 percent for the entire sample). Respondents in the West, however, are significantly more likely than the entire sample to attribute juvenile justice system involvement to neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure (45.4 percent v. 35 percent for the entire sample).

The Joint Center Survey respondents identified neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure (20.7 percent) as the *single most important reason* for juvenile justice system involvement among youth in foster care. Both drugs, alcohol, or substance abuse and family problems, broken homes, or domestic violence were chosen by nearly one in every nine respondents (10.7 percent for each response) as the single most important reason underlying engagement with the juvenile justice system by youth in foster care.

Runaways

Youth who run away from home sometimes are placed in foster care. Youth in the foster care system also are known to run away from their placements, for a variety of reasons.⁸³ Although more than a fourth of survey respondents replied that they did not know the percent of youth in foster care who had run away before they entered the system (26.8 percent), another fourth (24.9 percent) believed that between 1 percent and 10 percent had run away before being placed in foster care. Nearly 11 percent of the social workers polled believed both that none of the youth in foster care had previously run away (10.9 percent), and that between 11 percent and 20 percent of these youth had run away (10.6 percent). Thus, few of the survey respondents believed that runaways were in their employer's foster care service population.

The proportions of respondents who believe that youth run away after entering foster care are very similar to the proportions who believe that youth ran away before entering the system. A fourth (25.6 percent) do not know this proportion, 10.6 percent say that none do, 27.1 percent think that between 1 percent and 10 percent do, 10.2 percent think that between 11 percent and 20 percent do, and 9 percent think that between 21 percent and 30 percent do. The respondents' assessments of the proportion of males among their agencies' foster care service population, however, are associated with responses that differ significantly from those of the entire sample. In particular, respondents who believe that their agencies provide foster care to youth who are 21-40 percent male are significantly more likely than the entire sample to believe that between 21 percent and 30 percent of youth will run away once they are in the foster care system (16.7 percent v. 9.0 percent for the entire sample). Similarly, respondents who believe that their agencies provide foster care to a population that is about half (41-50 percent) male are significantly more likely than the entire sample to believe that between 1 percent and 10 percent of youth will run away once they are in foster care (34.8 percent v. 27.1 percent for the entire sample).

Summary

- Nearly half (46.5 percent) of survey respondents rated the resources available for the foster care system in their area as either fair or poor—32.4 percent rated them fair, and 14.1 percent rated them poor. Only 11.2 percent rating these resources as excellent.
- Nearly three-fourths (72.1 percent) of survey respondents said that the major reason underlying their fair or poor assessment of resources for the foster care system was either “too little money” (52.2 percent), or bureaucratic rules (19.9 percent).
- The proportion of social workers surveyed who rated the scope and benefits of the Chafee program as good (19.4 percent) was comparable to the proportion of social workers who worked in agencies that provided foster care or placement services (25 percent). The proportions who rated the scope and benefits of both the Education and Training Voucher program (28.2 percent) and the Transitional Living Program (27.5 percent) as good also are comparable to the proportion who worked in agencies that provided foster care or placement services.

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- A 70-percent majority of the social workers surveyed about the services available to youth *before they age out* of the foster care system believe that their state provides all of the following services: basic life skills building; interpersonal skill building; educational opportunities; job preparation and attainment; anti-substance abuse education, information, and counseling; mental health care; physical health care; and help in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or adult interested in maintaining such after the youth leaves the foster care system. Four of every five respondents reported that their states provide all but the last of these services.
- Although four of every five respondents (80.8 percent) believe that their states provide job preparation and training for youth *before they age out* of foster care, an even larger proportion (a total of 85 percent) believes that unemployment is either a major problem (53.2 percent) or a moderate problem (31.8 percent) for youth *aging out* of foster care.
- Nearly 90 percent of all survey respondents (88.6 percent exactly) believe that their states provide physical health care and almost as large a proportion (87.4 percent) believes that their state provides mental health care to youth in foster care. A much smaller proportion (52.4 percent), however, believes that most youth who are aging out of the foster care system (at age 18 or older) have access to health care.
- Only 10 percent of the social workers surveyed believe that matched savings accounts are available to youth in the foster care system in the locality where they work.
- According to survey respondents, the main reasons for the inability of youth in foster care to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult were: behavioral problems (56.8 percent), poor placement (46.8 percent), mental health issues (45.5 percent), family problems (10.6 percent), and gender (i.e., easier for females than for males—8.6 percent).
- Survey respondents were less likely to believe that services are provided for youth in foster care who become fathers (37 percent) than they are to believe that any one of the following services—prenatal care and counseling (76.4 percent), parenting skill building (73.4 percent), and child care (62.9 percent)—is provided to pregnant or parenting female youth.
- More than three of every five of the social workers polled (63.9 percent) believe that their state assists youth when they *age out* of foster care to locate, secure, and maintain transitional housing or permanent housing, or to retain permanent housing with the provision of rental subsidies.
- Fewer than half (43.5 percent) of all survey respondents believe that their states provide any of the following services to youth *after they age out* of the foster care system: basic life skills training, interpersonal skills development, education and/or job training, physical health care, mental health care, and anti-substance abuse education, information and counseling. Nearly a third (32.1 percent) believe that their state does not provide any of the services to youth after they age out of the foster care system.
- Three of every five survey respondents (60.9 percent) view the placement of youth in multiple foster homes as a major problem. The most frequently cited reasons for multiple placements were: behavioral problems (77.4 percent), poor placement (52.0 percent), and mental health issues (48.2 percent).
- The most important consequence of multiple placements cited by survey respondents was the lack of attachment/bonding. Lack of attachment/bonding was cited by 29.5 percent of the social workers surveyed, followed by 22.2 percent who cited the lack of stability as the most important consequence.
- Nearly three of every five survey respondents (57.5 percent) thought that multiple placements/adoption was the single most important reason youth in foster care change schools.
- Nearly half (46.5 percent) of survey respondents viewed falling behind academically as the most important consequence of changing schools frequently for youth in the foster care system. A lack of stability (11.2 percent) and no lasting friendships (10.6 percent) also were cited as important consequences of changing schools frequently.

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- Nearly half (46 percent) of the social workers polled believe that 20 percent or less of youth in foster care attend college. College attendance of 20 percent is a third of the rate (60 percent) at which all U.S. high school graduates enrolled in colleges between 1990 and 2001.
- In general, survey respondents believe that the percentage of youth in foster care who have been involved with the juvenile justice system is small. Respondents who believe that their service populations contain fewer males (i.e., an estimated 0-20 percent male) are more likely to believe that engagement with the juvenile justice system by youth in foster care is limited.
- Neglect, lack of supervision, or lack of structure is the main reason offered for why youth in foster care wind up in the juvenile justice system—35 percent cited this reason. An additional fourth (25.2 percent) attribute juvenile justice system involvement to drugs, alcohol, or substance use, and more than a fifth (22.6 percent) associate this involvement with family problems, broken homes, or domestic violence.

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TABLE 1
Rating of Federal Foster Care Support Programs
Percent*

Q25. Please rate the following federal programs according to the scope and quality of the benefits they provide. Are they excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know	Total
John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program	7.2	19.4	7.5	3.4	62.5	100.0
Education and Training Voucher Program	7.4	28.2	11.6	3.4	49.4	100.0
Federal Transitional Living Program	6.5	27.5	13.2	5.2	47.5	100.0

* Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*.
Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

TABLE 2
States Maintaining Youth in the Foster Care System Beyond Age 18
Percent*

Q13. Does your state maintain youth in the foster care system beyond the age of 18?

Respondent Characteristics	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
All Respondents	61.4	29.8	8.9	100.0
Respondents who work for public organizations	52.4	35.9	11.7	100.0
Respondents from states in which most youth in foster care are from suburban areas	68.3	24.8	6.9	100.0
Respondents from states that do not offer services to youth after they age-out of foster care	53.7	40.5	5.8	100.0

* Percents may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*.
Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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TABLE 3
Services to Youth by Foster Care Status
Percent

Q17. Does your state provide any of these support services to youth before they age-out of the foster care system?

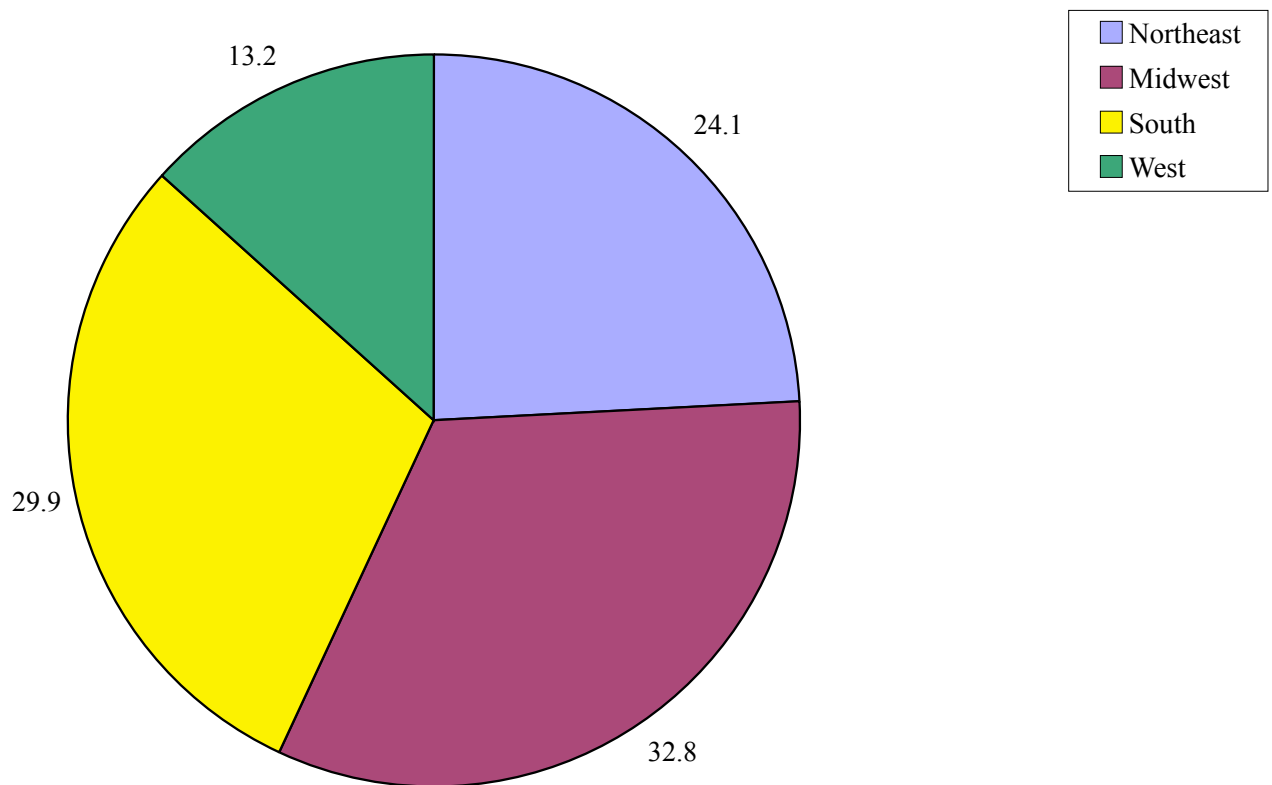
Q18. Does your state provide any of these services to youth after they age-out of the foster care system?

Support Services	Before Aging Out	After Aging Out
Basic Life Skills Building	84.9	71.3
Interpersonal Skill Building	83.2	59.8
Educational Opportunities	86.9	72.7
Assistance in Job Preparation and Attainment	80.8	64.4
Education, information, and counseling to prevent, treat, and reduce substance abuse	82.1	53.7
Mental Health Care	87.4	47.7
Physical Health Care	88.6	41.7
Assist older teens in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or interested adult	72.4	9.8

Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 1
Region of the Country in which Survey Participants Live
Percent

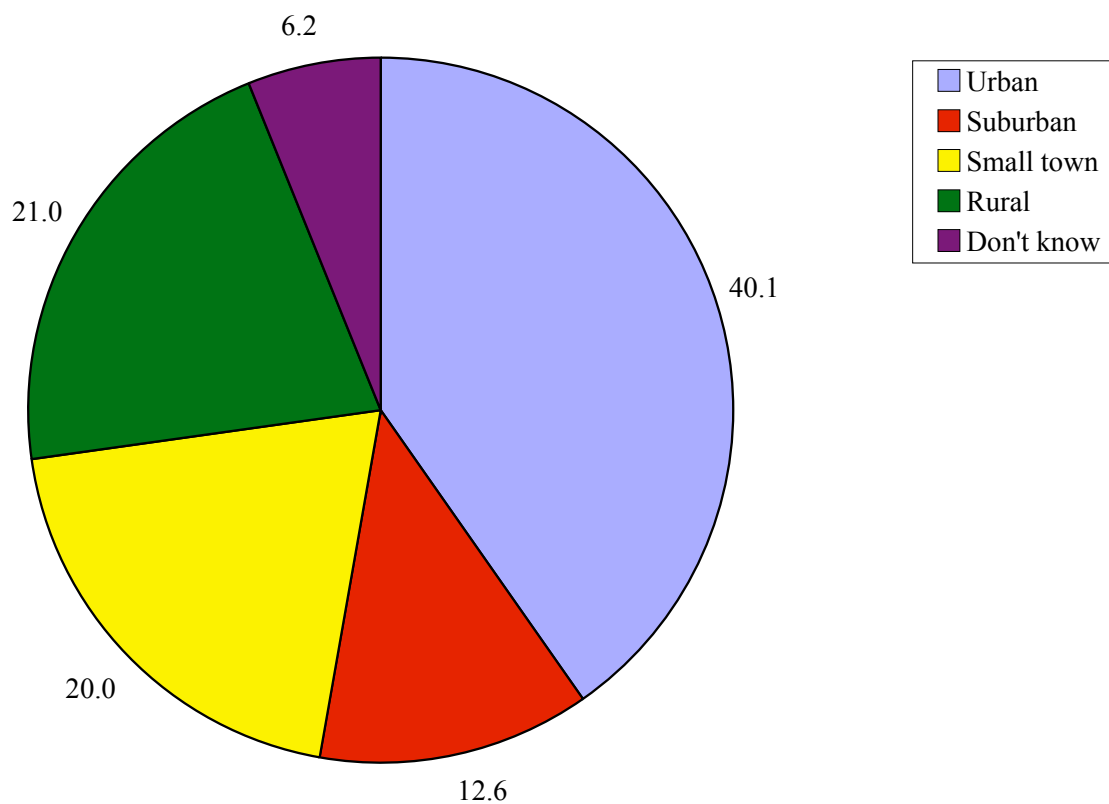


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 2
Type of Area in which Youth in Foster Care Live
Percent

Q6. Are the youth in foster care with whom you work from an urban area, suburban area, small town, or rural area?

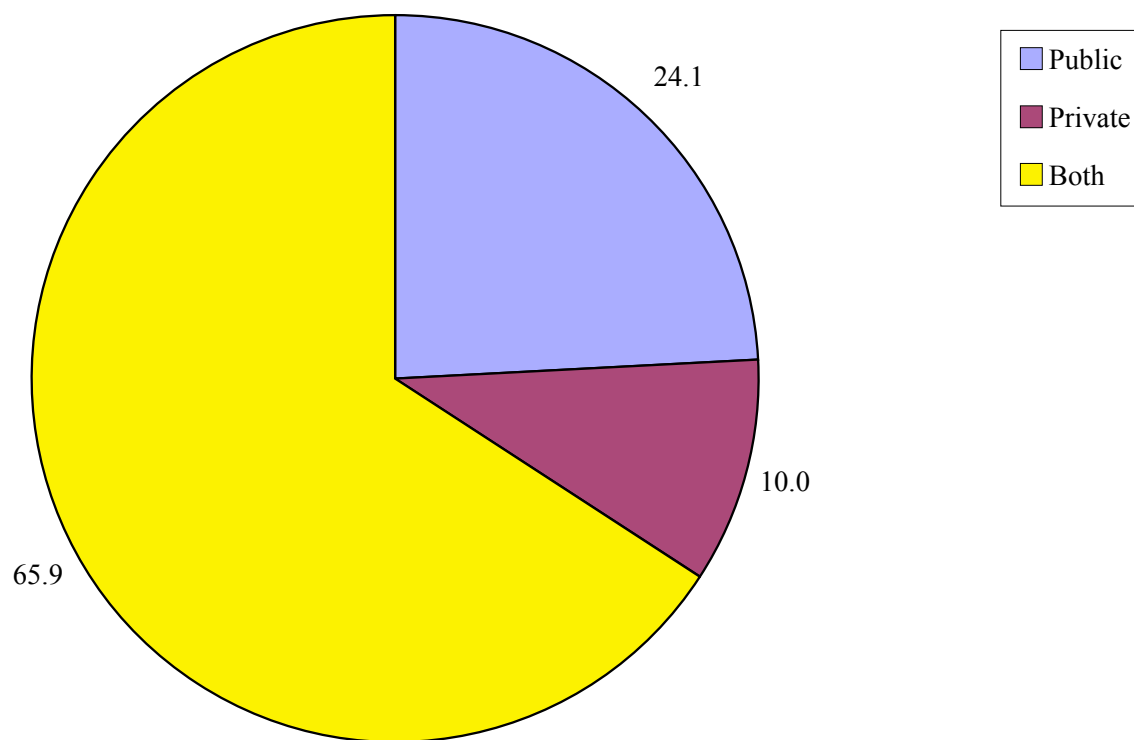


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 3
Type of Agencies Administering Foster Care
Percent

Q8. In your location is foster care administered by public agencies, private agencies, or both public and private agencies?



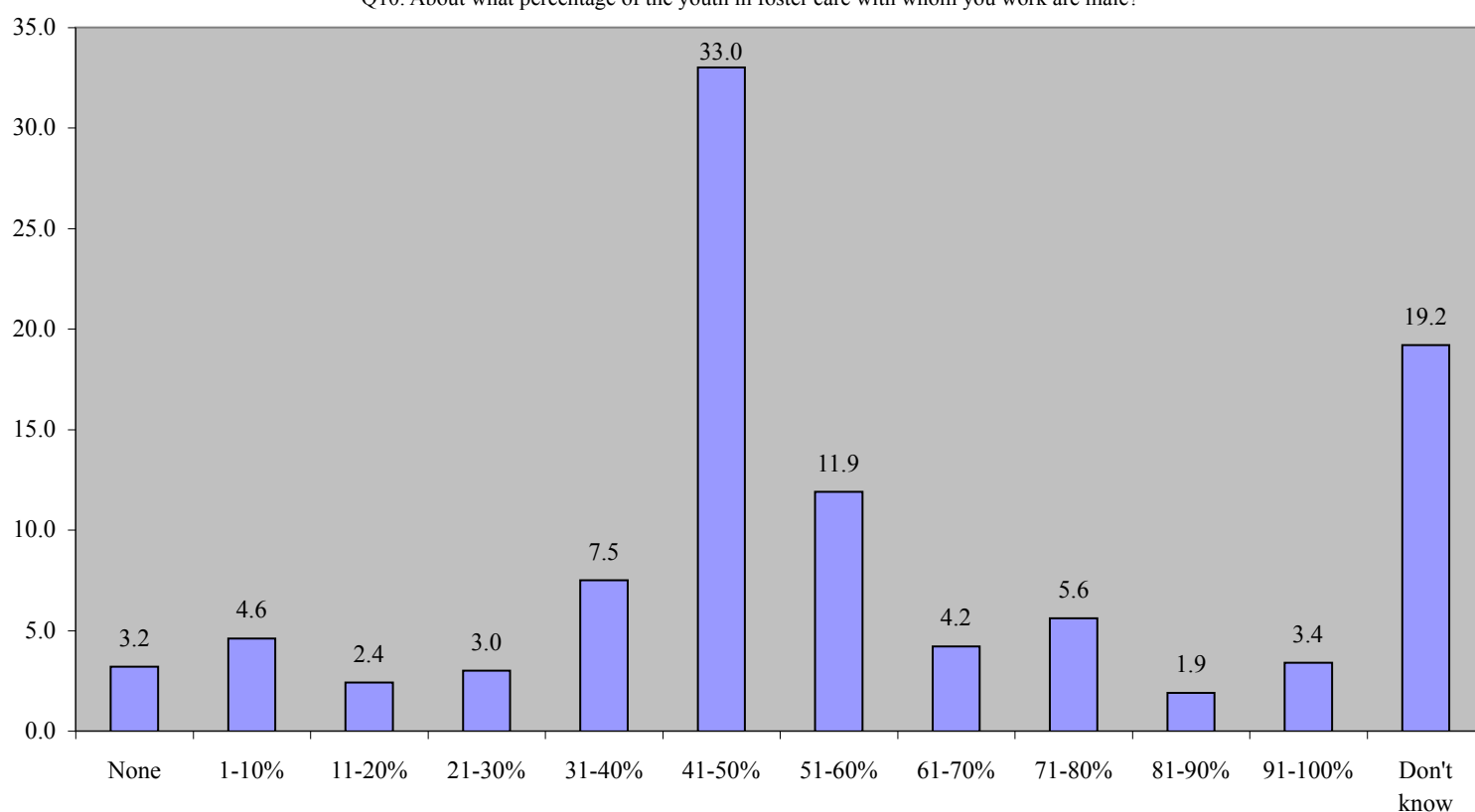
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 4
Percent of Youth in Foster Care Who are Male
Percent

Q10. About what percentage of the youth in foster care with whom you work are male?

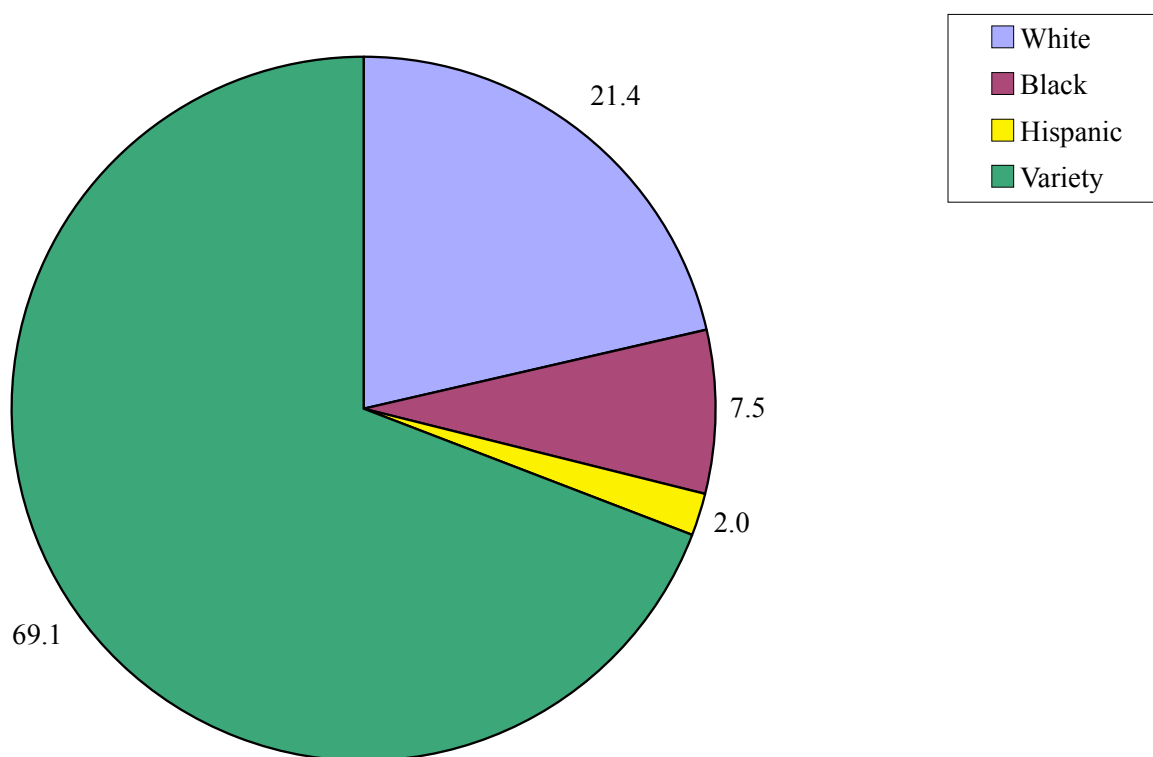


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 5
Race/Ethnicity of Youth in Foster Care
Percent

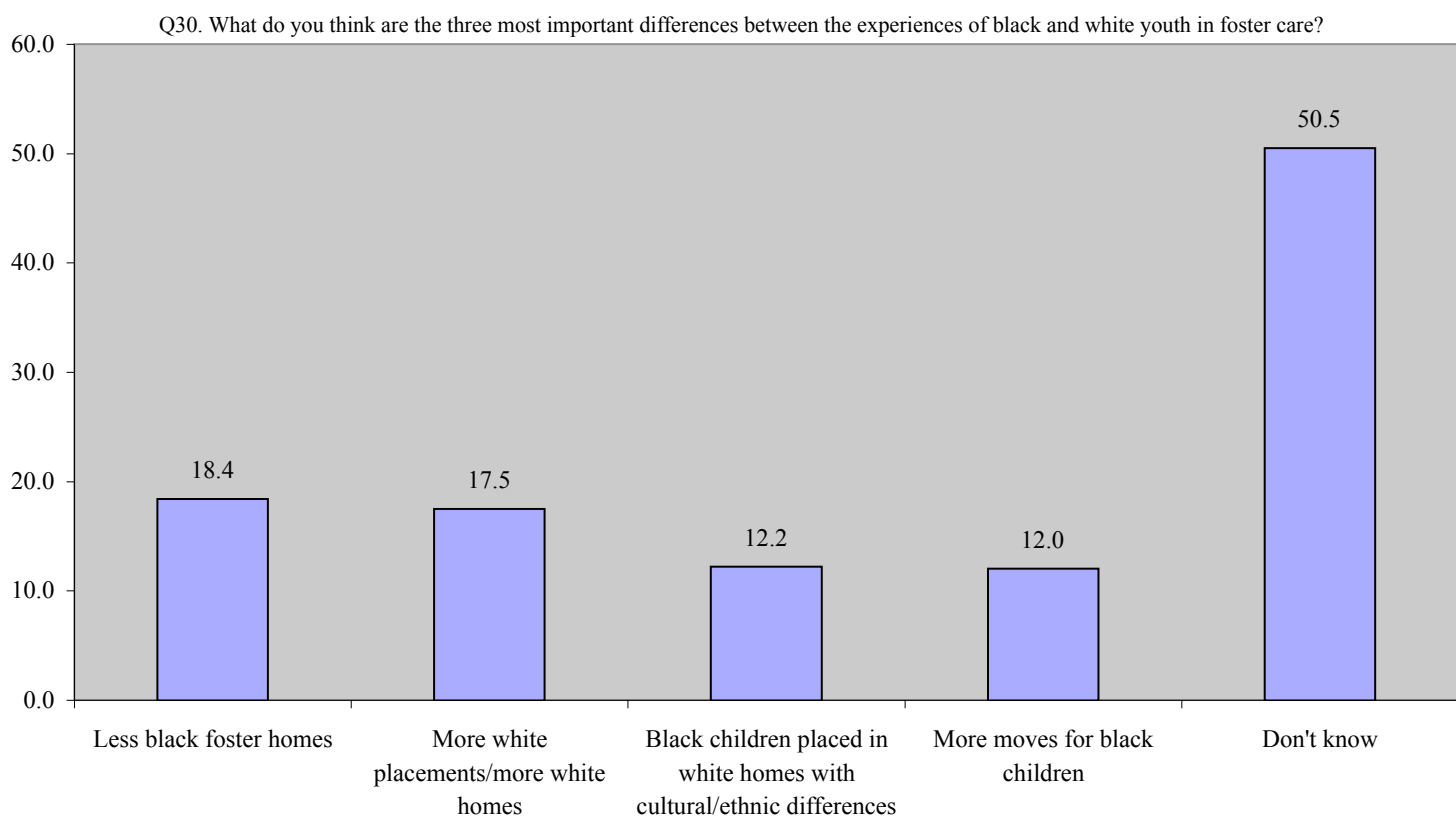
Q9. Are the youth in foster care with whom you work mostly white, black, Hispanic, or from a variety of racial and ethnic groups?



Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 6
Differences between Experiences of Black and White Youth in Foster Care
Percent

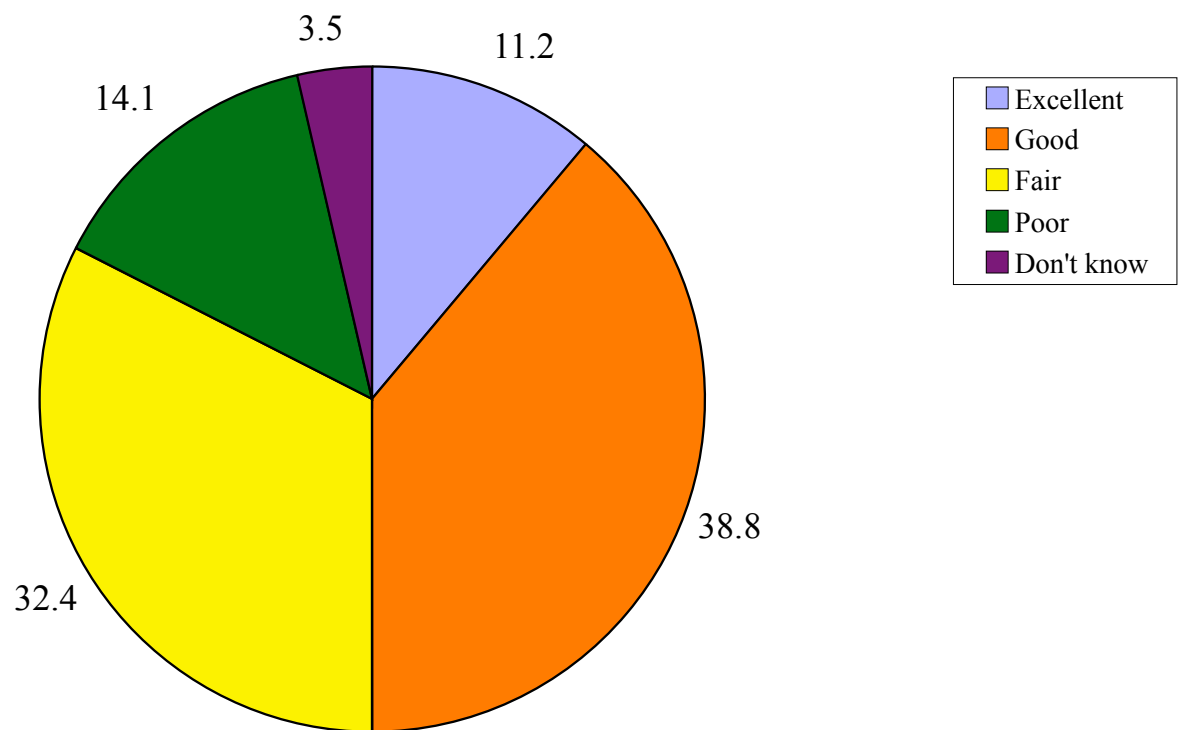


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 7
Characterization of Resources Available for the Local Foster Care System
Percent

Q5. How would you characterize the resources available for the local foster care system. Would you say they are excellent, good, only fair or poor?

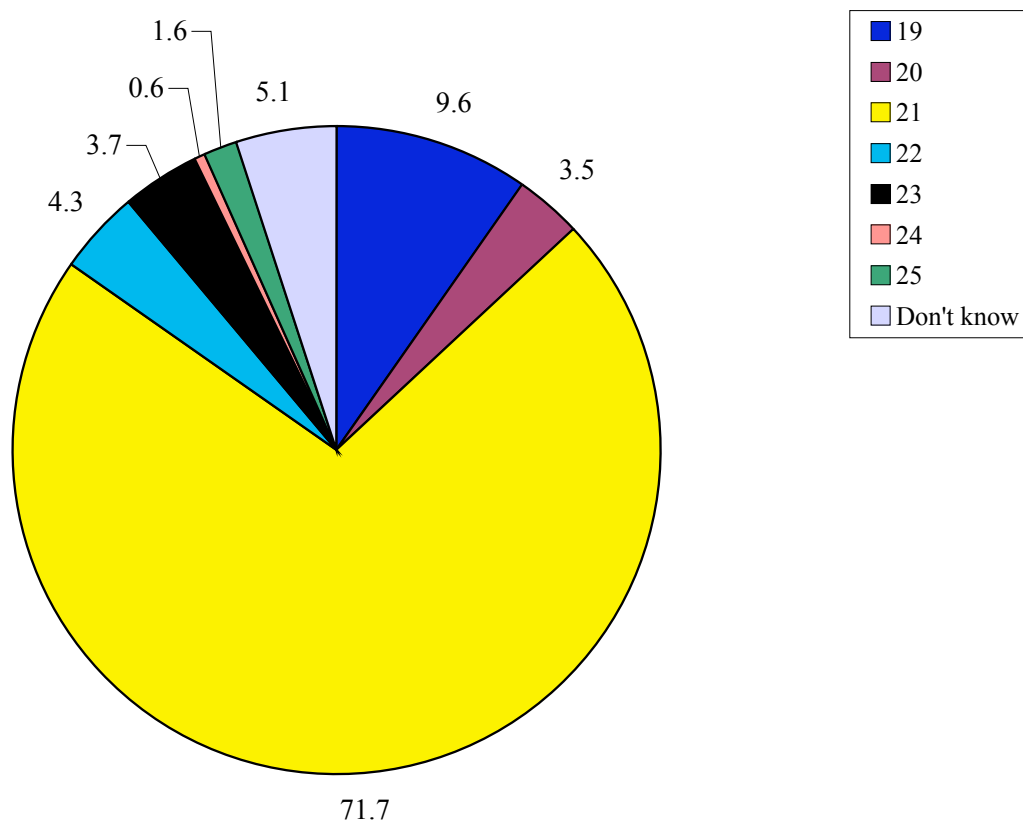


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 8
Age Beyond 18 to which Youth are Maintained in the Foster Care System
Percent

Q13A. Does your state maintain youth in the foster care system beyond the age of 18? To what age?



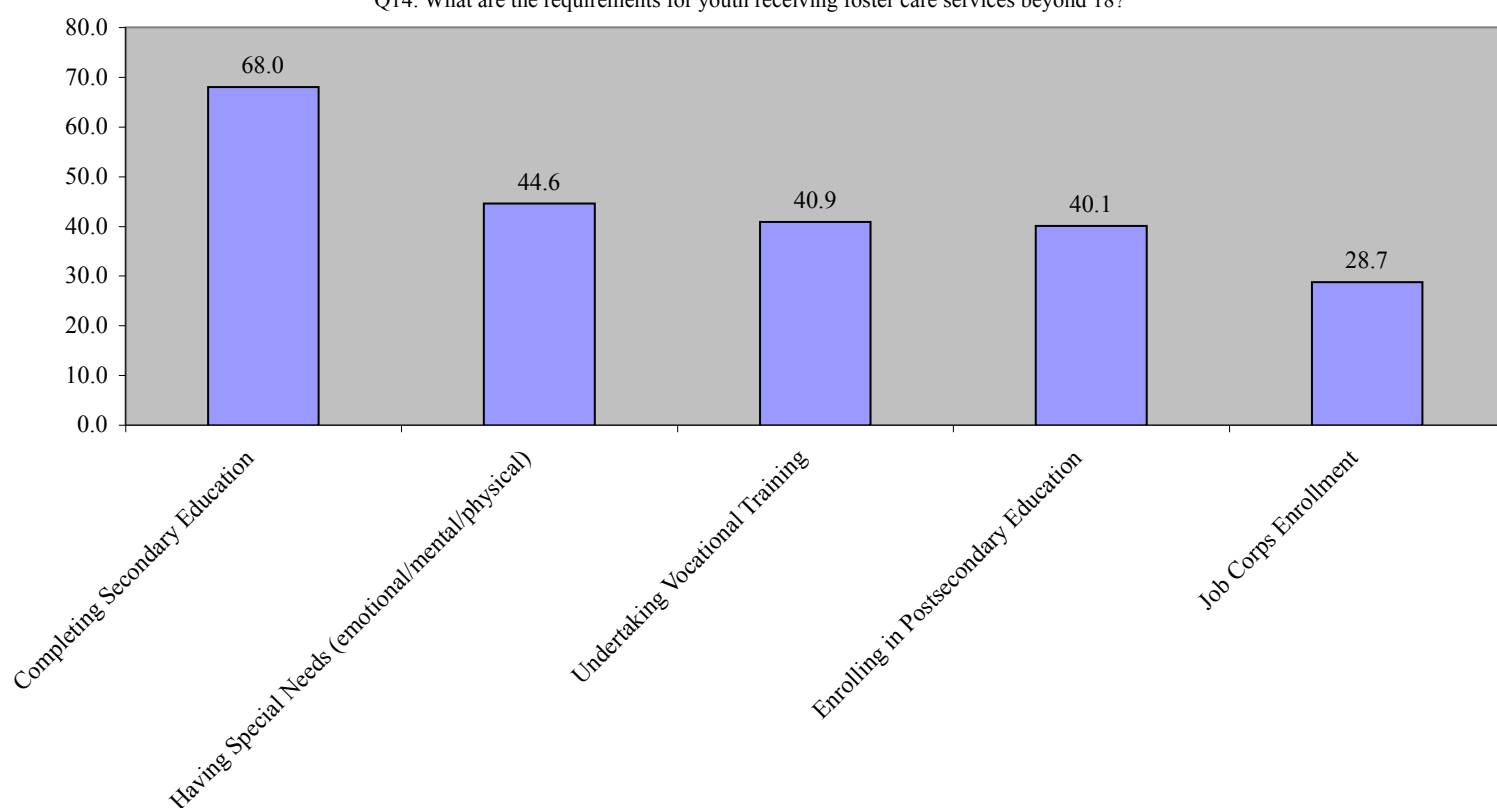
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 9
Requirements for Youth Receiving Foster Care Services Beyond Age 18
Percent

Q14. What are the requirements for youth receiving foster care services beyond 18?

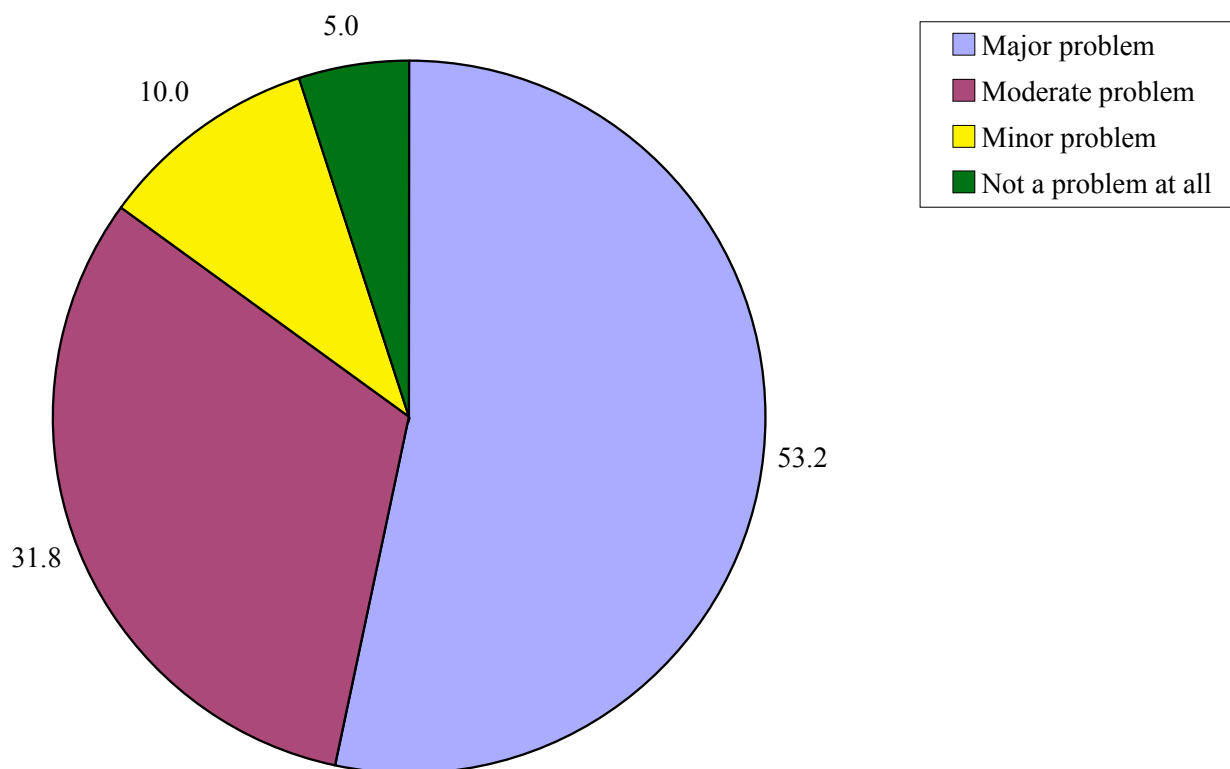


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 10
Degree to which Unemployment is a Problem for Youth Who Have Aged Out of Foster Care
Percent

Q43. How big a problem is unemployment for youth aging out of foster care? Is it a major problem, a moderate problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

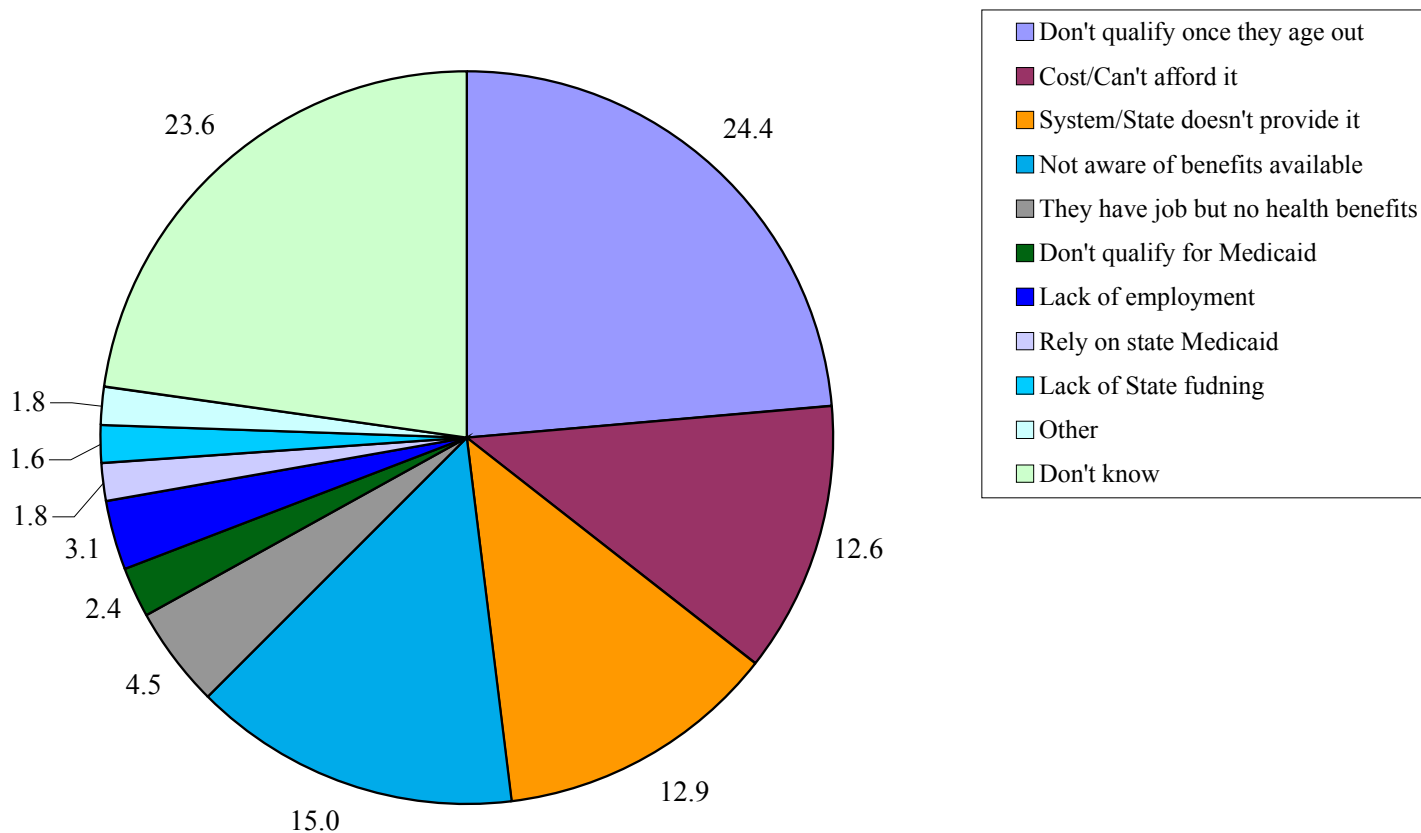


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 11
Reasons Youth Who Have Aged Out Do Not Have Access to Health Care
Percent

Q39a. Why do most youth who age out of foster care lack access to health care?



Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

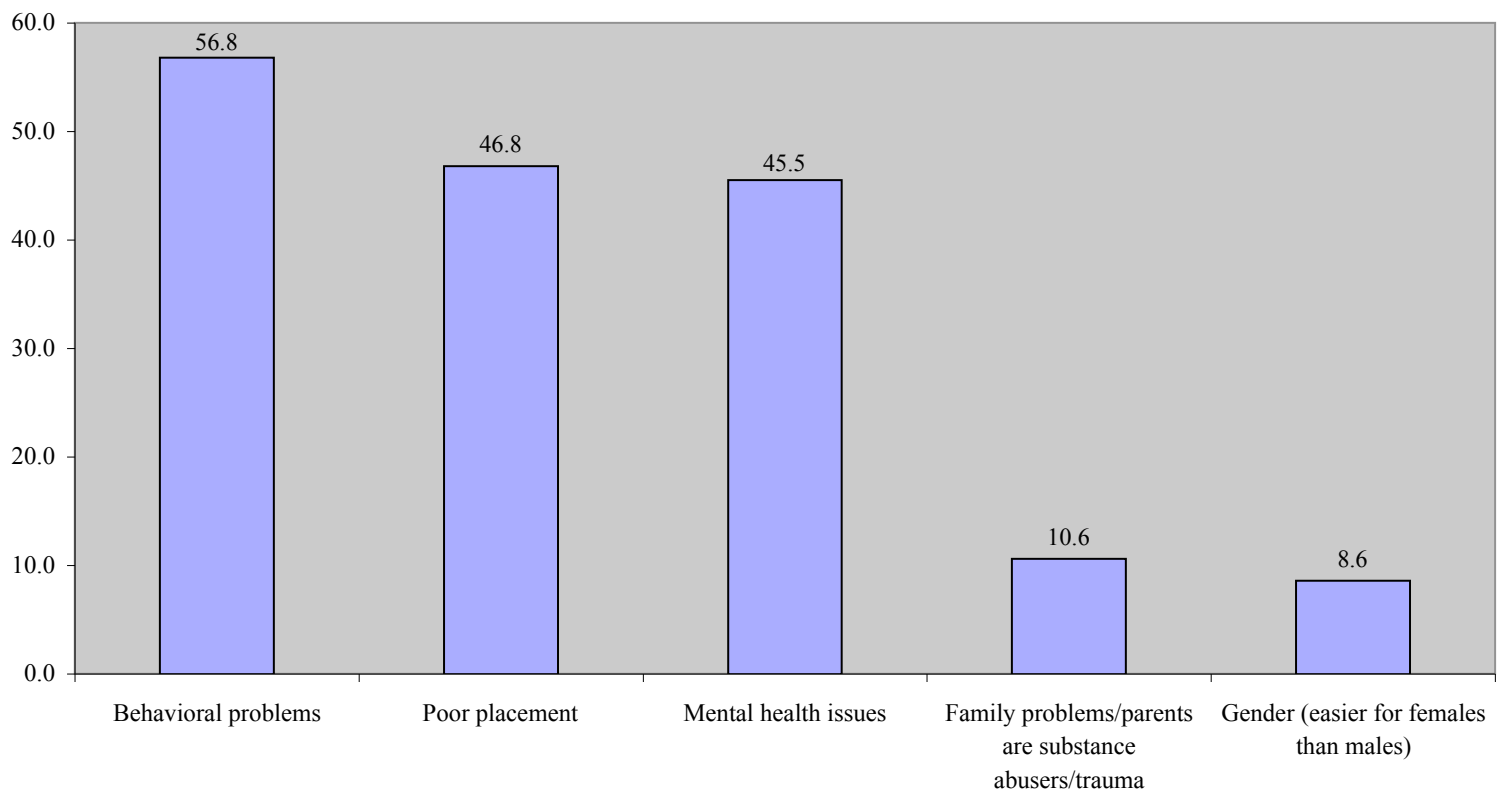
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Figure 12

Reasons Youth in Foster Care Are Unable to Establish a Permanent Connection with Family or a Trusted Adult
Percent

Q38a. What are the main reasons you think some youth are unable to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult?

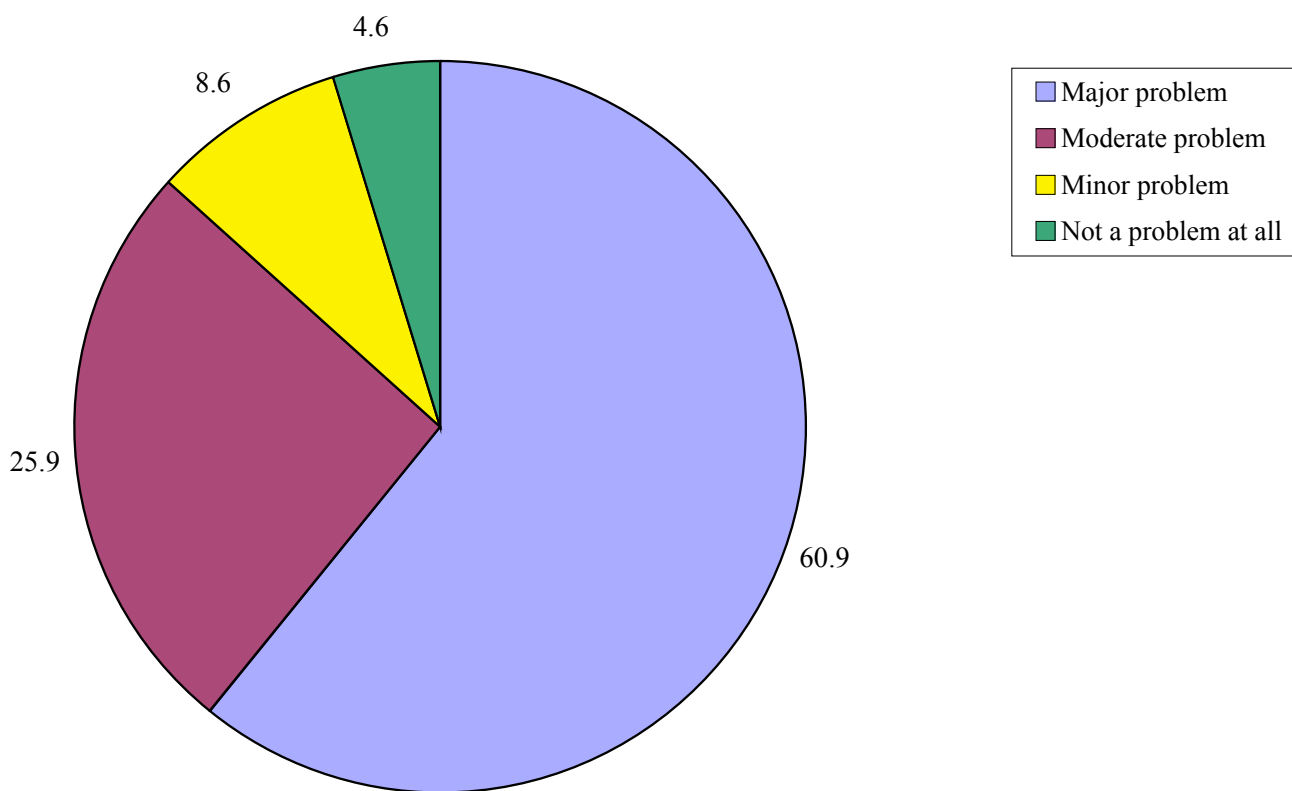


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 13
Degree to which Multiple Placements for Youth in Foster Care are a Problem
Percent

Q31. In your experience, how much of a problem are multiple placements for youth in foster care? Would you say they are a major problem, a moderate problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

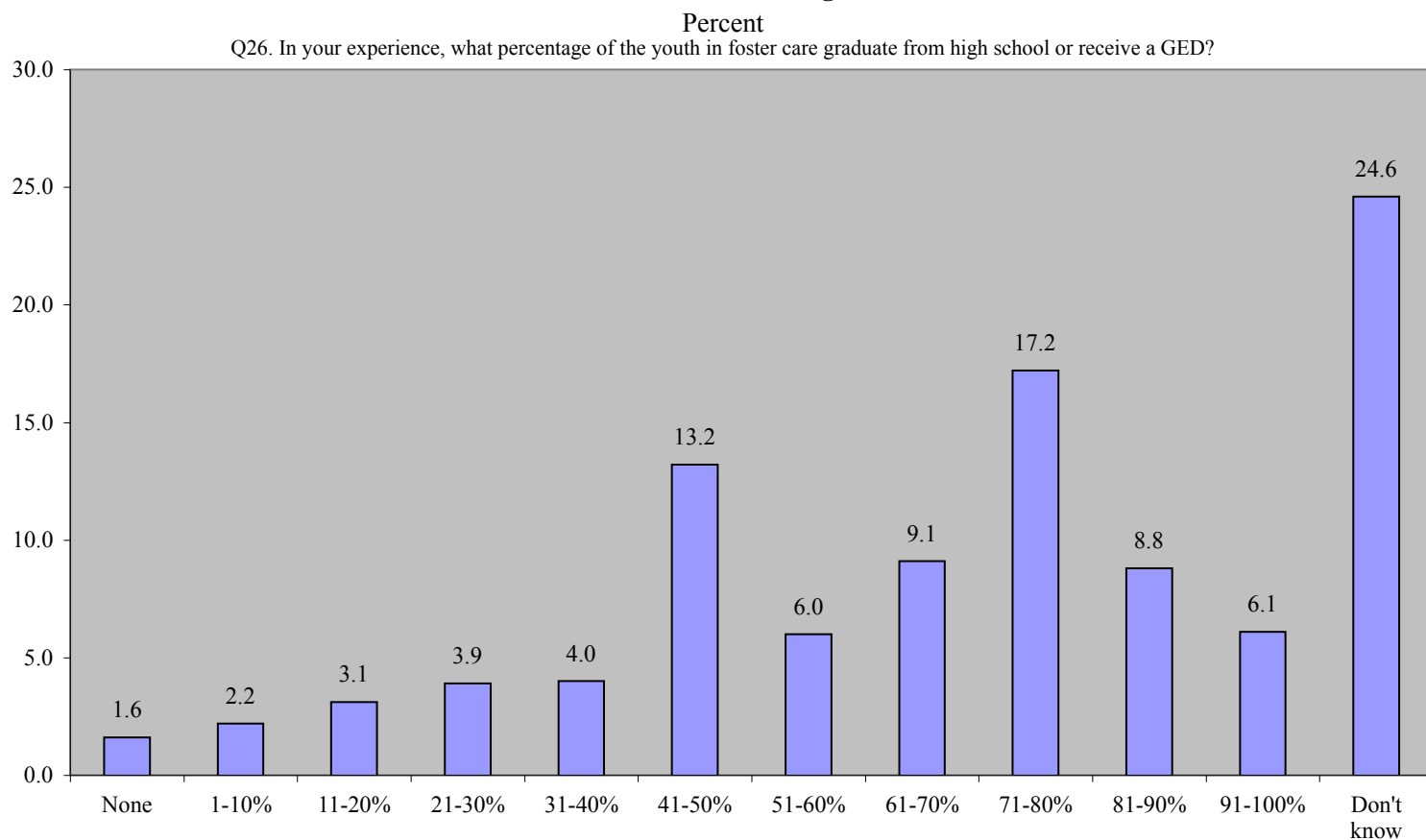


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 14
Youth in Foster Care Who Graduate from High School or Receive a GED



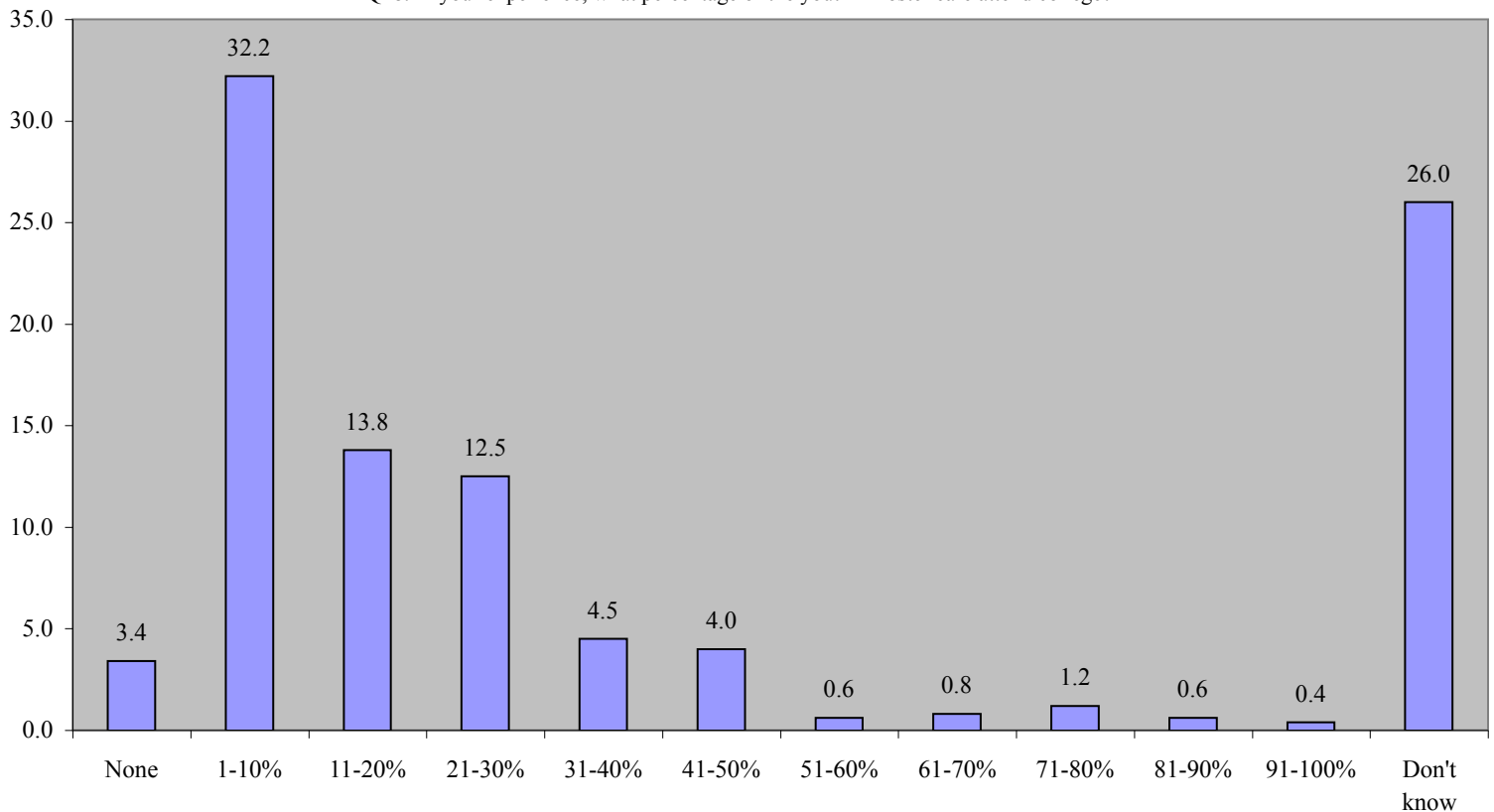
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 15
Percent of Youth in Foster Care Who Attend College
Percent

Q28. In your experience, what percentage of the youth in foster care attend college?



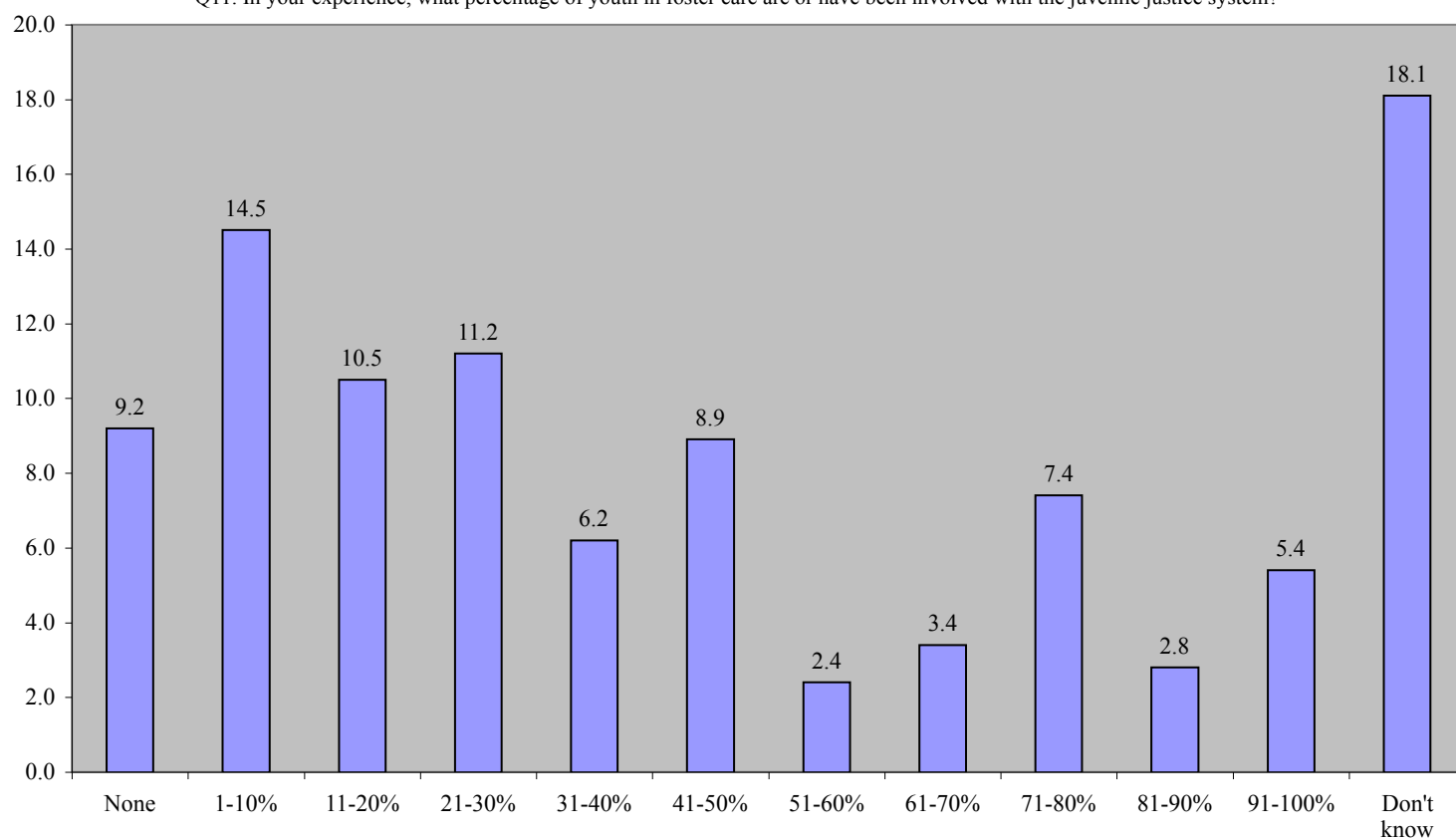
Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 16
Percent of Youth in Foster Care Involved with the Juvenile Justice System
Percent

Q11. In your experience, what percentage of youth in foster care are or have been involved with the juvenile justice system?

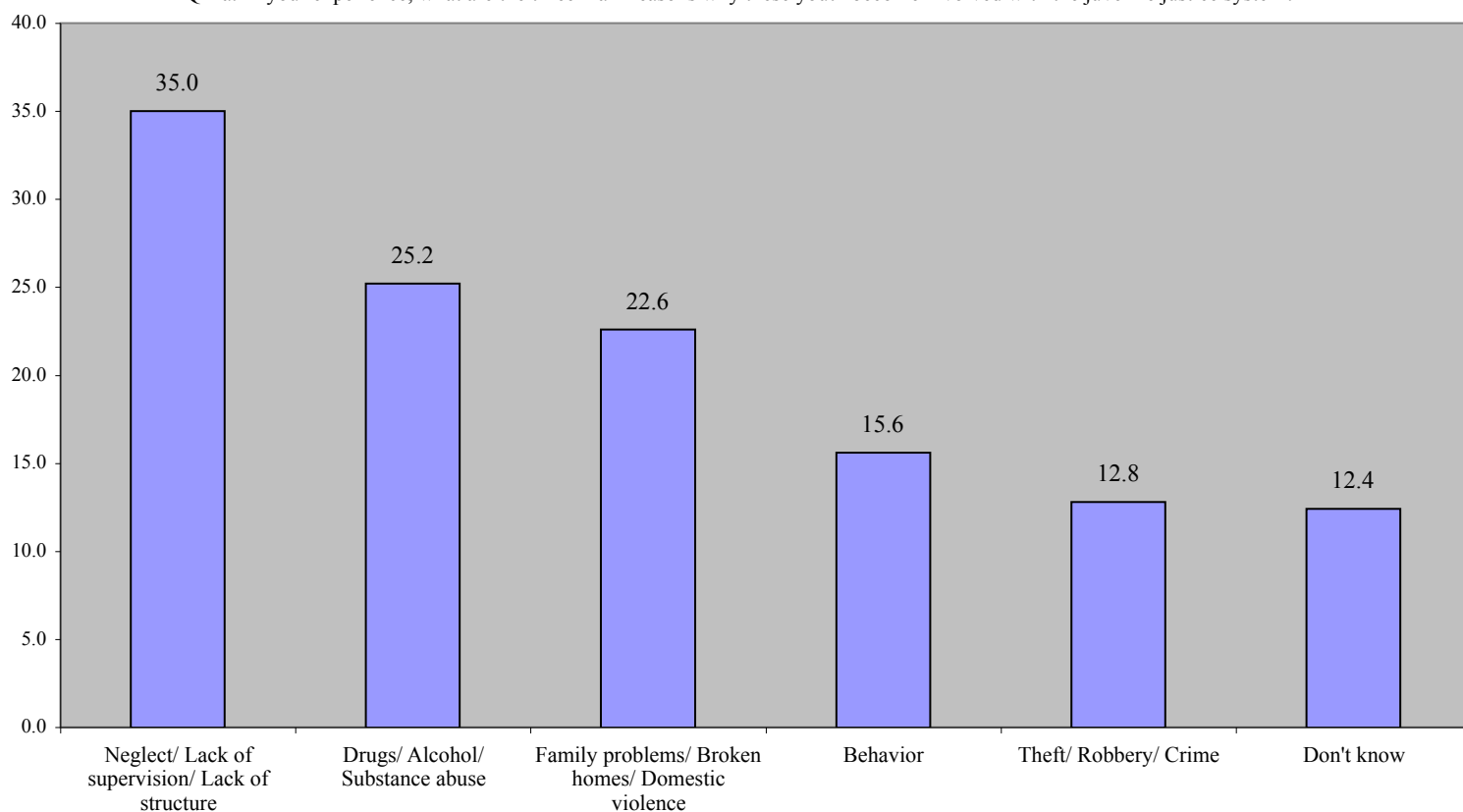


Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Figure 17
Main Reasons Youth in Foster Care Become Involved with the Juvenile Justice System
Percent

Q11a. In your experience, what are the three main reasons why these youth become involved with the juvenile justice system?



Source: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. *Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. 2007.

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Chapter III Findings from Listening Sessions

To get a first-hand perspective on the issues confronting youth as they transition from foster care to independent adulthood, the Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc. organized and conducted “listening sessions” with African American youth currently or formerly in the foster care system and with stakeholders in their communities. A listening session is a facilitated small-group discussion whose purpose is to elicit the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants. **(See Appendix C for the methodology for the listening sessions.)** These sessions were structured around a common set of questions, designed to gather information about three issues germane to youth who age out of foster care: community connections and supportive relationships, education and career planning, and life skills preparation.

Listening sessions were conducted in Jacksonville, FL (January 27, 2007), Houston, TX (February 24, 2007), and Chicago, IL (April 21, 2007).⁸⁴ In each site, youth and stakeholders participated in separate listening sessions. Stakeholders included community leaders, service providers, parents, educators, and legislators. **(See Appendix C for lists of participants in the stakeholder listening sessions.)** Florida, Texas, and Illinois all have implemented a version of the Independent Living Program, the Transitional Living Program, and the Education and Training Voucher Program—the major programs to support the transition of youth in foster care to successful adulthood. The implementation of these programs varies by state, however. It appears that these variations may be attributed to individual state funding priorities and to issues of privatization, communication, and accountability.

This chapter of the report is organized as follows. First, demographics for the youth participants at the three sites are provided. Then, each listening session is described separately, though the section about each session begins with a brief overview of the services provided by the state to assist youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The findings and recommendations from the listening sessions also are presented separately for each site and for the youth and stakeholder sessions in each site. A summary of the findings from all the listening sessions concludes the section.

Demographics

Listening sessions took place in Jacksonville, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois. These sites were selected because they have large concentrations of African American youth in their foster care systems. As of September 30, 2003, African American youth were 25.6 percent of all youth in foster care in Texas, 42.4 percent in Florida, and 67.7 percent in Illinois.⁸⁵ In 2003, African American youth were 35 percent of all youth in foster care throughout the nation, but only 15.5 percent of all youth under the age of 18 in the United States.⁸⁶

Across the three sites, 87⁸⁷ African American youth and 58 stakeholders participated in the listening sessions. Of the youth, 67 were male, constituted by all of the youth in Florida and Texas and two of the youth in Illinois. The remaining 20 youth in Illinois were female. The age range was between 14 and 22, with a majority of the youth in the Texas and Illinois listening sessions between 15 and 17 years old. A majority of the youth in the Florida and Texas sessions lived with a foster family, while in Illinois nearly equal numbers lived with a foster family (12) as lived with a relative (10). The majority of youth who participated in the listening sessions were in school, either high school or college.

Additional characteristics of the listening session youth include:

- Twenty-two (22) were employed;
- Nine (including one of the college students) had experienced homelessness;
- Six had been incarcerated; and
- Three of the 20 female youth had babies 1 year of age or younger.

Jacksonville, Florida Listening Sessions

Services for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care in Duval County

The state of Florida has privatized its foster care program. In Duval County in northern Florida—where Jacksonville is located—foster care is administered by Family Support

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CHART 3: YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS					
		Florida ⁸⁸	Texas	Illinois	Total
Age	Under 15 yrs.	3	11	3	17
	15-17 yrs.	7	20	14	41
	18-20 yrs.	6	8	4	16
	Over 20 yrs.	3	2	1	6
	Age Unknown	5	0	0	7
	Total	24	41	22	87
Gender	Male	24	41	2	67
	Female	0	0	20	20
	Total	24	41	22	87
Living Arrangement					
	Foster Family	18	27	12	57
	Group Home	0	5	0	5
	Residential Treatment Center	0	4	0	4
	Emergency Shelter	0	1	0	1
	Relative	3	2	10	15
	Independent	3	2	0	5
	Total	24	41	22	87
Education ⁸⁹					
	In School	19	36	15	70
	Finished High School	5	7	2	14
	In College	4	4	1	9
	Total	28	47	18	93

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Services of North Florida. This contract has been in place for two years and includes the administration of the following Independent Living Services. **(See Appendix A for additional information about Independent Living Services in Florida.)**

- **Aftercare Support Services** are available to youth ages 18 to 22. The program provides funds up to \$1,000 annually, for various services that the youth have demonstrated are critical to their development of the skills and abilities necessary for living independently.⁹⁰ The support services mandated by the Florida statute include mentoring/tutoring, mental health/substance abuse counseling, life skills classes, parenting classes, job and career skills, housing, temporary financial assistance, and financial literacy skills. The Independent Living Services Advisory Council indicated in their 2006 Annual report that "...in practice, aftercare services tend to be an emergency fund of money for youth rather than a series of services" that are mandated.⁹¹ In 2005-2006, only 500 of the 2,843 eligible youth throughout the state of Florida received these services. The average per youth financial assistance provided was \$645, for a total cost to the state of \$322,500. The cost to adequately provide these services is estimated at \$3,325 per youth annually, or \$1, 662,500 for the state.
- **Project Prepare** provides residential services (for between three and six months) and case management (for up to two years) for homeless youth ages 16-21. The goal of the program is to help youth transition from homelessness to stable independent living and to help them avoid teen parenthood and criminal behavior. It is administered by daniel,⁹² a private provider, and is funded by the City of Jacksonville, the Jacksonville Children's Commission, and the United Way. Housing may be provided at daniel's 12-unit efficiency apartment complex or supervised community programs, or in alternative housing with family members.⁹³
- The **Road-to-Independence Program**⁹⁴ assists youth formerly in foster care to receive the educational or vocational training needed

to become independent. To be eligible, youth must be at least 18 years of age and have not yet attained the age of 23. They also must have completed high school or be enrolled in an accredited high school, vocational school, or adult education program including college. Youth are eligible to receive up to \$10,704 annually. Tuition at Florida state schools is waived so that youth attending these institutions may use these funds for rent, utility bills, or other expenses.⁹⁵

- **Subsidized Independent Living** services are available to youth who are enrolled in school and progressing satisfactorily. Eligible youth must be age 16 or 17, in foster care, and have demonstrated a level of personal responsibility and proficiency in independent living skills. These youth may be placed in an unlicensed living arrangement.⁹⁶
- **Transitional Support Services** provides temporary (90-day) financial assistance to youth formerly in foster care to meet their critical needs for housing, employment, education, mental health, counseling, disability, and other vital services. It must be determined that meeting these needs is critical to their development of self sufficiency, independence and development of a personal support system. Youth are to be re-evaluated for eligibility every 90 days and can receive services until their 23d birthday, if it is determined that the aid is critical.⁹⁷ Thus, although Florida provides Temporary Support Services for 90 days on an emergency basis, these services can be received beyond the initial 90-day service period, as necessary. In addition, the Independent Living Services Advisory Council indicated in their 2006 Annual Report that only 42% of the eligible youth received these services in 2006.⁹⁸

Youth Listening Session

The Florida youth listening session took place on January 27, 2007. The community host was Mad Dads of Jacksonville Chapter Inc. (Mad Dads is an acronym for Men Against Destruction—Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder.) While Mad Dads is not affiliated with the Florida

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Department of Children and Families (the state department that contracts out for foster care services), their mission and community involvement in the improvement of outcomes for young men made them very compatible partners. Twenty-four (24) African American male youth attended the session. A foster youth who is currently attending college was the motivational speaker for the luncheon.

Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

Most of the 24 youth in the listening session were natives of Florida and planned to remain there after aging out of care at age 18. Eighteen of the youth are currently in foster care. Three of the group had been placed with relatives, and three were living independently. Seventeen of the 24 youth had been able to have regular visits with siblings and other relatives while in care. Only 11 were certain that they would live with relatives after leaving care. Fewer than half of the youth felt that remaining in the home of the foster parent was an option. One youth—who seemed to reflect the sentiment of many—indicated, “In reality people get tired of you fast; as soon as there is a problem you are instantly homeless.”

While discussing the reliable, supportive, and trusted adult in their lives, most reflected that they really did not have any trusted supportive non-peer relationships. After further prompting some named a foster parent, sometimes one from the past. Grandparents and parents were the second choice. The youth also related almost in unison that if the Department could have given money to their grandparents instead of to foster parents, they would not have been in foster care.

There was a clear message to the facilitators that the youth did not feel that they had any real advocates. They did not trust foster parents and staff to have their best interests as the motivation to serve them. The youth often expressed that they have no voice as to what happens to them in foster care. There were lots of comments about how unnatural it is to live with strangers that you never really get to know. There was a conspicuous absence of references to court-appointed Guardian ad Litem, judges, and supportive social workers, who are traditionally the built-in advocacy network for youth in foster care.

Youth Recommendations: Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

- Better screening of foster parents – recruit more who really care about the youth and are willing to adopt.
- Foster parents should get more money to meet the needs of youth.
- Provide homes with more foster fathers. Too often, foster mothers are rearing boys.
- Provide mentors for all youth. Reach out to members of the upper class, who do not need money and who want to mentor.
- Normalize foster care so that youth can spend the night with friends without requiring a background check on your friend’s parents. Enable youth in foster care to get a driver’s license while in care.
- Provide greater exposure to social and educational options through trips and outings.
- Provide foster care funds to grandparents and other relatives so they can care for their family members. This would keep the youth out of care, and allow them to stay connected to their families of origin and, thereby, live normal lives.

Education and Career Planning

This discussion focused on career goal, choice of goal, and preparation for independence through goal achievement. The following employment and career goals were indicated by youth in the listening session:

- 2 - Basketball players
- 1 – Boxer
- 2 – Computer Specialists (one youth learned to take computers apart in summer camp)
- 1 – Doctor/physician (who commented that he had to raise his grades)

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- 3 – Football players
- 1 – Military (Coast Guard)
- 3 – Music Industry (singer or producer)
- 1 – Preacher (who is planning to talk to elders in his church)
- 1 – Sports Photographer (who plans to pay for college with football scholarship)
- 1 – Writer

This represents 16 of the 29.⁹⁹ The other 13 did not have any firm goals for future occupations and careers.

Only four of the youth were able to identify anyone who had supported them in career decision-making. The identified support included a church mentor, foster parent, grandparent, and brother. Four of the youth are in college; it is not clear whether or not they are the same four. When queried as to the role of school counselors and foster care staff in shaping their decisions, the unanimous response was that no one in those systems shows any consistent interest in their educational and career futures. In fact, if you have been to a lot of schools you are automatically placed in special education. There is no liaison between education and foster care; therefore, there is no advocacy or follow-up for youth in the system. In Florida, youth in special education do not receive a high school diploma. They are issued an ESE (Exceptional Student Education) certificate that is not equivalent to a high-school diploma and limits future educational and employment options.

Only the youth over 18 years of age knew what funds and opportunities were available for further educational development. It was quite clear that from the perspective of the youth that all future planning for youth in the foster care system began at age 17, and that was too late. By then most youth were so frustrated with the system that they just wanted out.

Youth Recommendations: Education and Career Planning

- Someone should be assigned to teach youth what it takes to have a career and manage your life as an adult.
- Either training should be made available for good jobs before you are 18 or stipends should be made available after age 18 to pay for job training.
- Financial help should be available to each youth at age 18, until you get on your feet. You are too young at age 18 not to have any help.
- Provide foster youth with mentors and more presentations like the luncheon speaker to help youth succeed.
- Assign each foster youth a mentor to talk to about your goals and your future.
- Develop a positive group to express and explore issues and goals early so that you can begin to work on them before age 18.

Life Skills Preparation

Florida legislation mandates that foster youth be assessed for services needed at age 13, reevaluated annually through age 17, and given age-appropriate services. From age 15 to age 18, Independent Living Services are mandated. Law further specifies that beginning at age 15 and continuing at ages 16 and 17, life skills training should be provided. Youth unanimously reported the lack of adherence to this mandate. The Independent Living Advisory Council's 2006 Annual Report recommended that the state hire 70 life skills trainers to meet the needs of youth aging out of care. They project that each trainer could carry a caseload of 50 youth at an estimated cost to the state of \$4,375,000.

Youth did not acknowledge the receipt of life skills training prior to age 17. None of them had received tutoring or training related to banking, shopping, job seeking, resume writing, apartment hunting, lease negotiation, nutrition, budgeting, cleaning, cooking and basic health care. Six

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youth ages 18-20 knew how to balance a check book; this was because their foster parents taught them. Most of them knew how to cook basic foods and felt that nutrition was common sense.

Youth Recommendations: Life Skills Preparation

Youth in Florida had very few recommendations in this area:

- Provide vocational training for youth who do not plan to go to college.
- Provide counselors to help them develop job hunting skills and work habits.

What could have been done better for you while you were in foster care?

Youth were told that this was the most important question. It came at the end of a ninety-minute listening session. They responded as follows:

- A large majority (90 percent) of the youth talked about the staff lack of interest, lack of training, lack of availability, and lack of awareness of resources available to the youth. Recommendation: Establish greater accountability on the part of provider agencies for services to youth. In their 2006 Annual Report, the Independent Living Services Advisory Council concurs.
- Do a better job of screening foster parents and caseworkers, and hold them accountable for not doing a good job.
- Take youth concerns seriously when they complain about lack of follow-up on the part of staff . Currently, no one gets in trouble for not keeping their word.
- Do a better job of assessing the parenting skills of foster parents. Find out if they were/are successful with their own children.
- Recruit more foster homes containing fathers. Foster homes are mostly women rearing mostly boys.

- Pay relatives the same amount as foster parents, to enable them to care for youth related to them who are in need of homes, and to enable these youth to avoid going into foster care.
- Stop identifying youth as “foster children,” because of the stigma in school and in the community associated with this label.
- Provide someone to advocate for the needs and complaints of foster youth . Currently, no one represents us.
- Develop a program that helps with housing and job assistance for youth leaving the system at age 18.¹⁰⁰
- Enroll youth in the Independent Living Program before age 17.¹⁰¹

Stakeholder Listening Session

Thirty stakeholders participated in this listening session, also held on January 27, 2007. They included: foster parents, foster parent advisory board members, child welfare board members, CEO of foster care agency, a state legislator, a city council representative, a representative of a Congresswoman, birth parents and grandparents, several representatives of Mad Dads, and representatives of the faith community. The issues identified below represent the perspectives and concerns of the stakeholders.¹⁰²

System-Level Issues Affecting Male Youth in Foster Care

- The Chafee Foster Care Independence Program has not been fully implemented in Jacksonville. This law is interpreted and implemented differently across the state.
- Florida has not extended until their 21st birthday Medicaid coverage for all youth who have aged out of foster care.¹⁰³
- There needs to be more accountability for money spent for Independent Living Services.
- Florida law requires that 13-year olds be made aware of independent living services and followed

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up with assessments at ages 15, 16, and 17. This has not happened.

- Jacksonville is currently focused on the adoption of children in care and, thus, leads the state in adoptions. Teens, including those nearing the age of emancipation from the system, are not targeted for adoption, however.
- Thirty-two children a week come into foster care in Jacksonville, FL, an unacceptably high number.
- Grandparents and other relatives cannot afford to take care of family members because they are ineligible for foster care payment and services.
- The number of foster homes is insufficient, causing existing homes to periodically become overcrowded.
- Foster parents are paid only \$17.00 per day for the care of youth.¹⁰⁴
- At any given time, foster parents are caring for more than the number of youth permitted by their licenses.
- Most foster parents are women rearing African American males.
- Foster homes frequently do not have computers, a fact that places youth in foster care at a competitive disadvantage in school.
- Many youth are placed in special education because of multiple changes in foster homes and the resulting frequent changes in schools.
- ESE certificates are not recognized as high school diplomas for the purpose of seeking employment.
- It is difficult to get youth removed from special education after they are in high school.
- There is no established collaboration between the education system and the child welfare system. There also is no established education advocate for youth in foster care.

Stakeholder Recommendations

- Begin a campaign to recruit males to provide foster parenting, especially to male youth.
- Explore the comparative fiscal feasibility of licensing and providing services to relatives to care for youth needing out-of-home care. In other words, examine the impact on the state budget of paying relatives the same as foster parents currently are paid to care for their young kin who would otherwise go into the foster care system.
- Identify and explore best practices of successful collaboration between foster care and education systems in other states.
- Recruit and assign to youth in the foster care system substitute parents who will track their progress in school and be advocates for their proper placement within the school system.
- Explore the One Church, One Child¹⁰⁵ Foster God Parents Model implemented in Tallahassee, FL, as a means to establish permanent supportive relationships for youth in foster care.
- Explore options for soliciting donations from PC manufacturers of computers for youth in foster care.
- Follow up on the recommendations of the Independent Living Services Advisory Council to bring the Independent Living Program and the Transitional Living Program in the state of Florida into compliance with the law.

Houston, Texas Listening Sessions

Services to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Child welfare services in Texas are administered by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), and Texas refers to its Independent Living Services as Preparation for Adult Living (PAL). PAL staff uses case management to assist with transition planning and to help connect the youth leaving foster care to needed resources. Staff is specifically designated to provide the following services to youth between the ages of 16-20. (See Appen-

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dix A for additional information about Independent Living Services in Texas.):

- **Aftercare Room and Board Assistance** is based on need. This funding pays for living costs such as groceries or utilities. Aftercare Room and Board Assistance has a total cap of \$3,000 of accumulated payments per eligible youth. A maximum of \$500 can be received each month.¹⁰⁶
- **Ansell-Casey Youth Life Skills Assessment** is an evaluation of basic life skills. The instrument assesses youth abilities in different domains: communications, daily living, housing and money, work and study habits, social relationships, and self-care. The questions within each domain assess a variety of behavioral skills and practical knowledge. Both the young person and caregiver complete this assessment prior to the youth participating in PAL services.¹⁰⁷
- **Circles of Support** is a facilitated meeting with the individuals or caring adults identified by the youth as their support system. These participants, who can be a youth's foster care providers, teachers, relatives, church members, and mentors, come together to review the young person's strengths, goals, and needs. They offer support, and each team member identifies a personal way they can help. The group creates a transition plan or agreement to help the youth transition to adulthood.¹⁰⁸
- **The DFPS and Texas Workforce Commission partnership** expands services to youth aging out of foster care, by strengthening local collaborations between the two agencies. The partnership facilitates the sharing of information, help youth achieve PAL education and employment objectives, and provide housing referrals. The DFPS – Texas Workforce Commission Memorandum of Understanding was signed May 2006. Regional agreements with local workforce boards also have been developed.¹⁰⁹
- **The Education and Training Voucher (ETV)**

Program is provided to youth who have aged out of foster care or were adopted while in care when they were 16 or older, but have not yet attained age 21. Under this program, youth up to age 23 are eligible to attend postsecondary educational/vocational training, and receive assistance of up to \$5,000 per eligible youth per academic year to cover expenses for items such as residential housing, transportation, books, supplies, and child care.¹¹⁰

- **Extended Medicaid coverage** meets a critical need for young adults who have aged out of care. By completing a single application form, a young adult can have continuous Medicaid coverage until they turn 21. Annual recertification is required,¹¹¹ and young adults need to update the information on the application each year, if there are changes. When an update is completed, the information is entered, and there is no break in coverage.
- The **Extended Foster Care** program requires the DFPS to continue paid foster care for a youth who is enrolled in a secondary school in a program leading to a high school diploma. Eligibility ends when the youth graduates, drops out, or becomes 22 years old. Youth enrolled in vocational or technical training are eligible to continue in paid foster care until they are 21 years of age.¹¹²
- **Independent Living Skills Training** focuses on core areas such as money management, job preparedness, and planning for the future. The PAL staff, through a collaboration with public and private organizations, assist youth in identifying and developing support systems and housing for when they leave care. The PAL program not only offers youth in foster care skills and training but also, and perhaps most importantly makes youth aware of the options available to them. Independent Living Skills Training is designed to help young people learn the basic life skills that they would otherwise learn in their family.¹¹³ Typically this training is very hands-on and done in a group setting with other young people. Youth are provided help in learning how to balance a check book, how

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to be successful in a job interview, and how to access other resources such as health care and housing, as well as in understanding the importance of money management.

- **Support Services** are provided to youth preparing to age out of care and are funded through purchase-of-services dollars¹¹⁴ and supports from stakeholders such as local child welfare boards. Support services can include items needed for high school and college, counseling, tutoring, driver's education, and mentoring.¹¹⁵
- **Texas Youth and Runaway Hotlines** are not limited to youth in out-of-home foster care, but are a great resource for youth (including youth in foster care) who are in a crisis situation. The goal of the hotlines is to provide callers with the following: 24-hour crisis intervention and telephone counseling; information and referral for callers in need of food, shelter and/or transportation home; conference calls to parents and shelters; and a confidential message relay service between runaways and parents.¹¹⁶
- **Transition Centers** exist in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, with another scheduled to open in Corpus Christi in FY 2007. In a transition or one-stop center, a young person can go to one location to do all of the following: complete GED certification, receive PAL services, take a community college prep course, talk to the onsite apartment locator service, and receive employment training and placement services. Transition Centers provide an opportunity for the youth to develop personal and community connections, another important step in transitioning to adulthood. The Houston Alumni and Youth Services Center (HAY Center), which opened in July 2005, is noteworthy because of the nature of its funding. The Texas Workforce Commission submitted a federal grant proposal in collaboration with DFPS and received one of five demonstration grants to establish the center. It is the goal of DFPS to develop transition centers in each of the eleven regions of the state.¹¹⁷
- **Transition Planning** (for youth in foster care, ages 16 and older) has been standardized across the state of Texas through the use of a template. This form identifies for each youth what services are needed to accomplish transition goals. Its use statewide helps ensure that all youth are receiving consistent services. The plan outlines specific PAL services, is used in the Circles of Support conference, and is incorporated into each child's plan of service.¹¹⁸
- **A Transitional Living Allowance**—up to \$1,000 per eligible youth—is provided for youth who have aged out of foster care. These funds pay for rent or assistance to help a young person move into an apartment. They cannot receive more than \$500 per month.¹¹⁹
- **Tuition and Fee Waivers** (enacted 1993 and revised 1997) are available for eligible youth who have aged out of care or who were adopted from foster care at 14 years of age or older. Waivers cover the cost of public postsecondary education in Texas colleges, universities, or vocational programs.¹²⁰ In fiscal year 2006, a total of 914 youth receiving PAL services also received college tuition fee waiver letters. "Every year, colleges such as the University of Texas or Texas A & M and their extension campuses provide mentoring to college students who are PAL youth. Critical support such as mentoring and scholarships strengthen the youth's ability to be successful"¹²¹ in college. College partnerships also provide residential housing and leadership camps and conferences for PAL youth.

Youth Listening Session

The youth listening session took place on February 24, 2007. The community hosts were the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and the University of Houston. Forty-one African American males participated in the youth session. An alumnus of the foster care system, who is currently a Senior Director of Merchandising for SYSCO Corporation, was the motivational speaker for the luncheon.

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Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

Most of the youth were natives of Texas, with the exception of six who were from the following places: New York (1), Kansas City (2), California (2), and Louisiana (1). All six of the non-Texans wanted to return to their home states, but the Texans were planning to remain in the state after they aged out of care. Thirty of the 41 youth made regular visits with relatives, and some had daily contact with relatives by phone. Two of the youths had been placed with relatives, and seventeen felt certain that they would live with relatives after leaving care. Two of the college students lived on their own.

When queried about trusted and supportive persons in their lives, most referred to family members, mainly parents, grandparents and siblings. One youth had been recently reacquainted with his father. On the other hand, another youth who had been in care since birth did not acknowledge a relationship with any adult. He commented, "If your family does not want you, who can you trust?" A few youth acknowledged a trusting relationship with a PAL caseworker, a group home worker who was supportive when he had been suicidal, and a foster parent. Several youth seemed to have strong connections to clergy and members of their church. This group of youth in foster care seemed to be much better connected to their community than the groups in either Florida or Illinois. Most of them felt that having community connections and supportive relationships was very important.

Youth Recommendations: Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

- The department could schedule more family visits in normal environments such as parks or at eating places such as McDonald's. (Normal families do not visit each other in offices.)
- Youth should be able to get in a car or sleep over with friends without the requirement of a background check of the friends' parents.
- Caseworkers should be available on weekends, so youth in foster care will have the option of reaching someone if they need to.

- The state should provide financial support for youth to live with their relatives.
- Change the name from "foster children," so people will not treat you like poison and judge you. (No alternative name was suggested.)
- Staff could be more sensitive to the concerns of the youth and believe them more of the time.
- Provide more mentors for youth from the business community, from places such as Exxon.
- Have more speakers like the luncheon speaker – i.e., youth who have been in foster care and can provide hope and a role model for the future.
- Host more listening sessions to come up with solutions.
- Caseworkers should be sanctioned if they do not keep their word.
- Caseworkers should give youth in foster care more information about what is available before they are 16 and have messed up their lives. (The youth who made this point was one of several who had been incarcerated.)
- Allow youth to have more input into what happens to them, such as where and with whom they live.

Education and Career Planning

This discussion focused on career goals, choice of goal, and preparation for independence through goal achievement. The following career goals were reported by the youth in the listening session:

- 1 – Attorney
- 1 – Auto mechanic (his father's profession)
- 2 – Basketball players
- 1 – Engineer

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- 3 – Entrepreneurs
- 1 – Film industry employment (This youth was exposed to film making at the HAY Center.)
- 2 – Firemen
- 2 – Football players (One said football is the only reason that he attends school. The football coach encourages him.)
- 2 – Marines
- 2 – Police officers
- 1 – School counselor
- 2 – Software engineers

This list reflects the ambitions of only 20 youth (out of the 41 in the listening session), but as a group the youth in foster care in Houston had higher aspirations than these youth in either Jacksonville or Chicago. The Houston youth also named a number of people who had encouraged them toward these aspirations. Some of the people named were a fifth-grade teacher, PAL workers, a football coach, parents, counselors, and foster parents. Thirty-six of the 41 youth are currently in school and four are in college. While there were a lot of positive feelings about the PAL staff, some wanted to have learned about career opportunities when they were younger so that they would have been motivated to get better grades. One youth who had been incarcerated felt that he needed help earlier to manage his anger. One college student expressed the need for college students to have year round housing. This group did not express any issues related to school other than hating the designation of foster child.

Youth Recommendations: Education and Career Planning¹²²

- More and earlier exposure to different job and career choices. (This would motivate the youth to be serious about school and about their grades.)
- Exposure to people who have their own businesses.
- Teach youth early how to manage anger, so that

they do not end up with a criminal record.

- Automatically expunge juvenile criminal records for youth in foster care.¹²³
- Provide scholarships to cover tuition to attend out-of-state schools.
- Begin PAL services earlier, before ages 16 or 17.¹²⁴
- For youth who are not going to college, begin job training before age 16 or 17.

Life Skills Preparation

Texas applies the Ansell-Casey Youth Life Skills Assessment prior to providing Life Skills services and training. These services may begin at age 16 or 17. Youth were very well acquainted with the HAY Center and the PAL services. Most of the youth were receiving some level of life skills training. The youth described the full range of life skills training as part of PAL services being provided by the PAL staff, foster parents and caseworkers. Some of the skills training that was discussed included budgeting and savings, completing job applications, cooking, cleaning, self-control, check writing, medical care, housing, and safe sex. One youth who was in college commented on the availability of medical assistance as a real advantage.

Youth Recommendations : Life Skills Preparation

The youth made only one recommendation:

- Begin life skills training before age 16, especially for youth who do not plan to go to college.¹²⁵

What could have been done better for you while you were in foster care?

- Allow more visits with siblings and parents.
- Normalize foster care (e.g., allow overnight visits with friends without requiring background checks on the parents of your friends.)
- Be more sensitive to youth complaints about staff and foster parents.
- Give money to relatives so they can take care of their own kin.

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- The Education and Training Voucher program does not provide enough money for equipment needed for school.
- Provide more money to foster parents to buy clothes for youth, as they get older.
- Prepare youth who have been in care all of their lives to be “normal.”
- Caseworkers should be scheduled to work on weekends, to provide youth in foster care access to assistance, should they need it.
- Advocate to automatically expunge the juvenile criminal records of youth in foster care.¹²⁶
- Provide more exposure to business owners to teach youth how to begin a business.
- Involve youth in the decisions made about where they will live.
- Develop a savings account for youth so they will have some money when they become independent.
- Provide greater exposure to career and job opportunities.

Stakeholder Listening Session

Twenty-two stakeholders participated in the Texas listening session. Although most were service providers, the stakeholders also included an attorney, a DFPS board member, an applicant for a foster care provider's license, a pastor, a college professor, and a judge (who participated by phone). This group was very concerned by the lack of preparation of youth to enter the work force and by the lack of positive black role models in their lives of youth in foster care. They also were concerned that youth remained in care too long. Because long separations often damage family relationships, the stakeholders believe that youth in foster care sometimes turn to crime as a result of their rootlessness. The pastor felt that people who care should fast and pray and seek the counsel of God about the plight of youth in foster care. He is thoroughly convinced that the black church has failed these young people. Most agreed that the government couldn't solve all of the problems. Problem

solving begins with the community that has identified the problem. A group leader accepted a challenge to convene interested parties from the stakeholder listening session to develop a funding strategy and at minimum begin to mentor the young men in foster care. The first meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, February 28, 2007.

System-Level Issues Affecting Male Youth in Foster Care

- There are too few male role models in their lives.
- Traditional life skills are inadequate preparation for mentally challenged youth as they transition.
- Foster care placements provide only bare bones care. Placements need to be enhanced to provide experiences such as Boy Scouts, camp, music, cultural activities, and mentors for the youth.
- Youth are not able to live with relatives because the relatives can not afford to care for them without financial support.
- Multiple placements cause youth to fall behind in schools.
- Placement experience is so traumatic for some that they run away and, therefore, are unable to take advantage of the Independent Living Programs available to them as older teens.
- Runaway and homeless youth from the foster care system often become involved in criminal activity.
- The state DFPS is overwhelmed and alone cannot be expected to solve all of the problems related to the state foster care system.

Stakeholder Recommendations

- Encourage foster parents to elevate the exposure of youth in order that they may develop their talents.
- Advocate for grandparents and other relatives to be licensed and funded to care for youth in order to reduce their time in foster care and nurture family relationships. Instead of giving up on them, provide

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services to the nuclear and extended families of origin to enable them to provide better care for their children.

- Begin training mentally challenged youth as young as 12 or 13 years old to learn a trade. It is too late to begin this training at age 16 or 17.
- Recruit African American mentors from corporations to demonstrate to youth that they can be successful but that they will have to delay immediate gratification of some desires to be able to do so.
- Explore the reinstatement of the One Church, One Child model to increase the number of African American youth who are adopted.¹²⁷
- Explore engaging oil corporations to provide additional resources for transitional living.
- Recruit mentors from the churches in the Houston community to intervene on behalf of these young men, as necessary.

Chicago, Illinois Listening Sessions

Services to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care in Cook County

The Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) administers the child welfare services in Illinois. The Independent Living Services are delivered through a network of private providers. A Youth Advisory Board established by DCFS provides some coordination of services to youth, in addition to developing youth leaders and advising the DCFS on emerging youth issues. The following Independent Living Services are available to Cook County youth. **(See Appendix A for additional information about Independent Living Services in Illinois.):**

- The **Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program** assists youth currently or formerly in foster care to attend postsecondary schools. Youth may receive a maximum of \$5,000 per year for tuition, room and board, books, fees, and the cost of transportation to and from school. These funds are available to youth ages 16 up to the age of 23 who are in school.¹²⁸
- The **Independent Living Program** provides housing for youth ages 18 to 21 years who have demonstrated that they are able to work, attend school, and live independently. These youth live in apartment settings that they or DCFS may have located. The DCFS pays rent and utilities, and youth are provided a stipend of up to \$1,200 per month for additional expenses. Many youth take the option offered by DCFS to open a savings account, to have some funds for support after they leave this arrangement. Youth in foster care are able to attend state schools at minimal cost.¹²⁹
- The **Transitional Living Program** provides a bridge between foster care and independent living. Youth at least 16 years of age who are in school or employed have two living options. Either they can live in apartments that accommodate a total of six to eight youth of the same age and sex, or they can live with an adult who functions as a mentor.¹³⁰ In a supervised arrangement they are taught the skills to live independently. Youth may remain in these supervised arrangements for six months to one year. While in these arrangements they are provided counseling, life skills classes, health care, employment preparation, educational advocacy, and social and recreational opportunities. After they have mastered the skills of living independently, they may move to the Independent Living program.¹³¹
- The Youth in College/Vocational Training Program supports youth who are in college or vocational training and either currently or formerly in foster care. Youth must maintain a 2.0 average and carry a full-time education schedule (12 hours minimum) to qualify for this program. One of the program benefits is a stipend of \$444.85 monthly (which youth may receive until age 23). Program-eligible youth also are eligible for medical assistance through age 21.¹³²
- The Employment Incentive Program (which replaced the Youth in Employment Program in January 2006) is available to employed youth in foster care who work at least 20 hours per week and are at least age 17 but not yet 21. These youth may receive a stipend of \$150 per month for up to 12 months. These 12 months need not be

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consecutive, and the funds may be supplementary to the support received from any of the programs noted above.¹³³

Youth Listening Session

The Chicago listening sessions took place on April 21, 2007. The community sponsors were the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services and the Hyde Park Career Academy. Twenty (20) African American females and two African American males attended the youth listening session. *This was the only session that included female youth.* A foster youth who is currently Vice President of the Cook County Youth Advisory Board and attends a local college was the youth speaker for the luncheon.

Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

Most of the participants believed that they would remain in the Chicago area after age 21, because they had roots and at least one family member there. Only four of the 22 youth felt that they would leave the area. Eighteen youth had regular contact with relatives while in care, but only four felt that they would remain with them after age 21. (The eighteen include 10 youth who currently are in relative care.) Foster parents and grandparents were identified as the most trusted adults by most of the listening session youth, but many did not believe that residing with them beyond age 21 was an option. Nearly half of the youth (10) were living with relatives and were confident that these supportive connections were solid and would last beyond their DCFS connection.

Four of the young women were either pregnant or parenting. They were the least confident about post-placement community supports. *Most of the youth felt that they lacked advocates in the foster care system and had little knowledge of the advocacy roles of court appointed Guardian ad litem and of the judges who conducted their review hearings.* Only one young woman had developed a relationship with a Guardian ad Litem. There was an overriding distrust of caseworkers and other agency personnel. When asked what they knew about youth who left the foster care system without community supports, *many said that these girls end up in dead-end situations such as living with abusive boyfriends, in shelters, or in jail, and no longer in school.* As a

group they were clear that having supportive adult relationships was extremely important. Most of the youth who lived in the foster family relationship felt that *foster parents were not being held accountable for being responsive and attentive to their needs, including basics such as food, clothing, and an allowance for which the foster parents receive funding.*

Youth Recommendations: Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

- Establish an organized system to provide mentors for all foster youth.
- Host more discussion groups with foster youth to tell them what services and options are available to them.
- Allow more predictable and scheduled visits with family members in order to stay connected, even if these relatives are in jail.
- Mandate that group homes involve parents in the decisions about their children.
- Provide more financial support for teen parents; \$107.00¹³⁴ is an inadequate stipend to care for babies.
- Allow teen parents to stay in foster care if the foster parent is willing. This would reduce disruption in the relationship.¹³⁵

Education and Career Planning

In Chicago, the facilitators did not discuss the career questions. Therefore, only one young woman's career preference was determined. One person was planning to leave Chicago to move to Los Angeles to open a dance studio. Her long-term foster mother encouraged her in this direction, just as she had acknowledged and encouraged her talents. Three other youth felt that they would leave Chicago for Atlanta or another city to seek greater opportunities for employment success.

- Four of the girls were seniors in high schools, and two of them were planning to attend college.

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- Three girls (sophomores and juniors) had babies and continued to attend school; a fourth was pregnant.
- Only one senior in high school had been made aware of educational opportunities available to youth in foster care.
- One young woman wanted to leave the system before age 21 because of her frustration with the lack of accountability within the system to meet her basic needs and the resulting lack of control over her life.
- Schools treat children in foster care differently, as if they are worth less. They are assumed to be troublemakers.
- The Youth Advisory Board members urged youth not to give up opportunities for higher education, job training, and supportive housing because they are angry at the system. They would be giving up an opportunity not easily regained.
- Life skills training should begin before the teen years for all youth in foster care.
- The DCFS should monitor the spending on foster youth in foster homes and establish greater accountability for the expenditure of program funds.
- The DCFS should make more of an effort to keep children in foster care connected to their birth parents and relatives. Most foster parents and group home living arrangements do not allow this.

Summary

The listening sessions revealed many common barriers to the successful transition to adulthood by youth in foster care in three jurisdictions with high concentrations of African American youth in their systems. In this section the common concerns and cross-cutting recommendations identified by youth and stakeholders alike are highlighted.

Common Concerns of Youth

- Youth in all sites felt that they had no voice and no advocates in the foster care system. The traditional advocates are social workers, Guardian ad Litem/ Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and judges. Only one youth among the 87 participants in the three listening sessions had experienced that support.
- Youth in Florida and Texas felt that if their grandparents or other relatives could have received stipends to support them, they would never have been placed in foster care.¹³⁶
- Youth in all sites wanted to be connected to a supportive adult to guide them in decision-making. They referred to them as mentors.
- Youth in all sites questioned the qualifications and dedication of foster parents. They did not feel that these individuals were motivated by a desire to care for them.
- Youth in all sites questioned the monitoring of and dedication of social workers within the foster care

Stakeholder Recommendations

The stakeholders group of six included two birthparents, one pastor, and three DCFS staff. They recommended the following:

- Create regular opportunities for youth to be updated on independent living programs available to them through the DCFS.
- Establish mentorship programs to support and encourage youth who do not have firm family supports.
- Connect every child in foster care to a mentor by age 16.
- Focus on providing education, life skills training, and employment for all youth in foster care. Establish benchmarks for successful mastery of relevant skills to lessen the number of youth who end up in jail or homeless.

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system.

- Youth in all sites were concerned that they had no exposure to the full range of career options and associated educational opportunities before they were 17 years old. This was perceived as too late to responsibly plan for their futures.
- Youth in all sites experienced being placed in special education as a result of multiple placements that caused multiple school changes. This prevented those for whom this designation was inappropriate from receiving an academic education.
- Male youth in all sites were concerned that they did not have male images in their lives, because foster care is provided primarily by single females.
- Youth not planning to attend college felt that they had no job skills.
- Several youth who were emancipated at age 18 had experienced between three and seven nights of homelessness. A tenth (10 percent) of the youth participants had experienced homelessness.
- Youth in all sites felt that the system could have done a better job of keeping them connected to family. Lack of family connections while in foster care caused family disruption and lack of support.
- Most youth under the age of 18 were unaware of Independent Living Program offerings.
- Youth in all sites felt that age 16 is too late to begin to learn basic life skills. Many indicated that they were quite unprepared to enter the world independently.

Common Stakeholder Concerns

- African American males have too few male role models because of the lack of both birth and foster fathers in their lives. Foster care is provided primarily by females.
- Mentally and physically challenged youth in foster care group facilities do not get the life skills and

basic independent living exposure made available to youth who reside in private homes with foster parents.

- Mentally and physically challenged youth should be given job skills training, earlier than youth who do not have these challenges.
- There is insufficient accountability for program expenditures for Independent Living Programs.
- The placement instability of foster care motivates many males in foster care to leave the system prematurely, and thus opt out of receiving Independent Living Services.
- Runaway and homeless youth in foster care drift into homelessness and criminal activity.
- The inability of relatives to receive stipends comparable in value to those received by foster parents causes irreparable damage to youth. Many non-relative foster care placements could be prevented if such funding were available.
- African American males in foster care are over represented in special education.

Cross-Cutting Youth Recommendations

- All youth in foster care should have a mentor to guide them in decision-making and managing their life as an adult, and to be their voice in the foster care system.
- There should be more discussion groups with youth in foster care to tell them about the opportunities (services and options) available to them.
- Allow more predictable and scheduled visits with family members, even those in jail, to keep them connected.
- Training for good jobs should be provided before one reaches age 18, and stipends to pay for training should be provided after age 18.
- Provide the same level of financial support to

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relatives of children in foster care as is provided to foster parents, to enable the relatives to care for these youth, so they will not have to go into foster care.

- Create regular opportunities for youth to be updated on independent living programs available to them.
- Begin job training before age 16 for youth who are not going to college.
- Provide more and earlier exposure to different career and job choices. This would have a positive impact on the seriousness with which youth in foster care approach school and their studies.
- Require better screening of foster parents.
- Require better screening of social workers
- Involve youth in decisions about their lives.
- Teach youth early how to manage anger, so that they will not end up with a criminal record.
- Have records of crimes, committed before age 18, expunged.

Establish benchmarks for the successful mastery of relevant skills.

- Recruit African American mentors from churches and corporations.
- Recruit males to provide foster parenting to males.
- Compare to the costs of the current foster care system the fiscal feasibility of licensing and providing services and stipends to relatives who cannot care for youth without support.
- Identify and explore best practices for child welfare and education collaborations.

Cross - Cutting Stakeholder Recommendations

- Child welfare agencies should be monitored for accountability when implementing the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.
- Child welfare should expend more effort to keep foster youth and birth families connected.
- All youth who do not have firm family connections should be connected to a mentor.
- Life skills training should begin before the teen years for all youth in care.
- Youth who are not in the college track should receive training in specific employment skills.
- Focus on providing education, life skills training, and employment for all youth in foster care.

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Chapter IV Synthesis and Recommendations

Using a literature review, a telephone survey, and listening sessions as tools, the Joint Center Health Policy Institute (JCHPI) and the Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc. (BACW) conducted reconnaissance on youth aging out of the foster care system in the United States. These three methods enabled us to develop insights into the workings of the foster care system and the experiences of youth while in the system and when aging out of it. This project was undertaken to guide the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in its thinking about steps they might take to help meet the needs of youth who age out of foster care.

This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings generated from the use of these methodologies along with recommendations based on these findings.

- < The first section describes the methods employed to conduct this project.
- < The second section presents macro-level issues, findings, and recommendations. Summary recommendations are presented, along with recommendations made by youth and by the stakeholders.
- < The third section contains a similarly structured presentation about the experiences of youth. Youth experiences are covered by topic—community connections and supportive relationships; education; employment; health care; housing; and juvenile justice.
- < The chapter concludes with follow-on analyses and summary recommendations for steps that might be taken by philanthropic institutions.

Methods¹³⁷

The JCHPI collaborated with BACW to gather information about the status of youth aging out of the nation's foster care system. To do this, we employed three primary methods: a review of research and programs, a telephone survey, and listening sessions.

A review was conducted of the research literature about youth transitioning from the foster care system to adulthood and descriptions were sought of programs that serve these youth. Because African American youth are over-

represented in foster care systems around the country (relative to their proportion of the youth population of the United States), our goal was to gather information about the experiences of and the issues that arise for African American youth (especially males) as they age out of the system. When we examined the numbers of youth in foster care by race/ethnicity (white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and other) per state, we found evidence of persisting disproportionality for African American youth in the foster care system.¹³⁸ However, we found little published research that addressed the specific experiences and issues of African American youth as they age out of foster care.

The second tool employed was a telephone survey conducted by Research America for the JCHPI between February 13, 2007, and April 5, 2007. The Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care was administered to 800 social workers around the country. Because of their frequent encounters with youth in foster care, a random sample of social workers was surveyed to capture their views not only about the youth aging out of foster care but also about the system that serves these youth and the services provided for the substitute parents (foster parents, legal guardians, and relative caregivers) with whom the youth live. The survey responses represent the views and beliefs of the social workers polled about aspects of the foster care system in the geographic areas in which they work. Again, because of our interest in African American youth, the survey questionnaire probed for differences by race/ethnicity in the experiences of youth in and aging out of foster care. In most cases, however, social workers did not identify differences among youth in foster care that were specific to race/ethnicity.

The third method to gather information about youth aging out of the nation's foster care system involved conducting listening sessions with youth and with stakeholders in the system. In three cities (Jacksonville, FL; Houston, TX; and Chicago, IL), African American youth (ages 14 to 22 and either currently or formerly in foster care) and people who identified themselves as stakeholders in the foster care system (e.g., child welfare agency staff, substitute parents, members of community-based and civic organizations) were convened in separate listening sessions. The goal of the listening sessions was to elicit the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants by asking a structured series of questions to gather information about three areas of concern during the transition to adulthood from foster care: community connections and supportive relationships,

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education and career planning, and life skills preparation. Because of our particular interest in gathering information about the experiences of African American males in foster care, the youth listening sessions included more males (72 total¹³⁹) than females (20 total). Both the youth and the stakeholders shared their perspectives and opinions about the systems in their locales.

Macro-Level Issues and Recommendations

Although couched in many ways, the vast majority of comments and suggestions that emerged from our reconnaissance of the foster care system related to enhancing the resources for and functioning of the system itself. This, of course, is “easier said than done” because there are, in effect, more than 50 foster care systems in the United States. In other words, each state and territory has designed its foster care system in keeping with the guidelines for receipt of federal funds—for the Independent Living program, the Transitional Living program, and the Education and Training Voucher program—but also reflecting each state’s priorities and goals. Thus, if they were to study only the relevant federal laws and regulations, youth, substitute parents, stakeholders, and average taxpayers would not know exactly how the foster care system in their state works and why. Ironically, though, and perhaps more importantly, without examining federal legislation and regulations directly, the parties most directly affected by foster care systems are unlikely to know the scope of federally permissible foster care services and to be unable to compare these to the services provided within their state system.

The desire to know the number of youth in or aging out of foster care each year illuminates a major challenge for the U.S. foster care system as a whole. Because there are more than 50 different systems and each state or territory establishes its own data collection and reporting protocols and timelines—e.g., some report data monthly, others annually and by fiscal years with different beginning and ending dates—it is difficult to obtain the number of youth in foster care across the nation at any moment in time. In addition, states use different definitions for collecting and reporting racial/ethnic data for the youth in their child welfare systems. Thus, knowing the numbers, the race/ethnicity, and the status of youth in the foster care system at any moment is a challenge.

Another challenge reported by a sizable proportion of survey respondents is the quantity and quality of resources

available for their local foster care systems. Less than one of every nine respondents (11.2 percent) rated these resources as excellent, and a total of 46.5 percent of respondents rated child welfare resources as either fair (32.4 percent) or poor (14.1 percent). When asked the reasons for their fair or poor ratings of the resources available to their local child welfare systems, nearly three-fourths (72.1 percent) of these survey respondents replied either “too little money” (52.2 percent) or “bureaucratic rules” (19.9 percent).

Although “too little money” is a common complaint about government programs, variations in the strength of this complaint with respect to the foster care system were noted for areas with different types of administrative and service delivery systems. Among respondents who cited system resources as either fair or poor, social workers in places where the county administers foster care were *less* likely (41.2 percent) than the entire sample of social workers (52.2 percent) to attribute the lack of resources for the system to too little money. In other words, the social workers interviewed in the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care seem to perceive that county-administered systems make somewhat better use of available funds than systems administered by either the state or local governments. In areas where states administer foster care, 57.1 percent of survey respondents gave “too little money” as the cause for their rating as either fair or poor the resources available to the foster care system in their area. Similarly, in areas where local governments administer foster care, 50.8 percent of respondents offered the same reason for their ratings.

Respondents in areas in which foster care services are provided by private agencies, however, were more likely (63.4 percent) than the entire sample (52.2 percent) to cite too little money as the major reason for their fair or poor rating of the child welfare system’s resources. This finding suggests that systems in which private agencies deliver foster care services may be perceived as less efficient users of available resources than systems in which public agencies or a mix of agencies (public and private) do this.

Many of the issues raised by both youth and stakeholders in the listening sessions also could be the result of either too little money or bureaucratic rules. For example, the youth in the listening sessions who found bothersome the rules requiring background checks of the parents of friends with whom they want to spend the night were complaining

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about bureaucratic rules. Youth who perceived the reason they wound up in a foster home as the lack of stipends to enable their grandparents to raise them as relative caregivers could be complaining about both bureaucracy and too little money. The stakeholders who critiqued the states for their failure to provide independent living services to teens younger than age 15 and who found the \$17 per day given to foster parents for each youth in their care (Florida) too small also were finding fault with situations that could be attributed either to bureaucratic rules or too little money.

Multiple placements, an undesired but commonly noted hallmark of the foster care system, is a challenge that may use up resources available to foster care systems throughout the nation and thereby may be associated with the issue of too little money. Three-fifths (60.9 percent) of survey respondents viewed this as a major problem. The most important consequence of multiple placements—lack of attachment/bonding, cited by 29.5 percent of survey respondents—has implications for the concerns voiced by youth in the listening sessions. Many of the youth in all three of the listening sessions (in Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago) felt they had no advocates. They did not trust and had not developed good relationships with foster parents or child welfare staff and did not trust any of these adults to have their best interest at heart. In addition, many youth in the listening sessions did not know of or have viable relationships with any of the following: judges, Guardians ad Litem, supportive social workers, or court-appointed special advocates.

Recommendations

Just as there were numerous concerns with the nature and functioning of the foster care system in the United States, numerous recommendations were made to address these concerns. The recommendations included here are of three broad types:

- Summary recommendations that reflect analyses of macro-level issues within the foster care system.
- Recommendations from the youth in the listening sessions in Jacksonville (Florida), Houston (Texas), and Chicago (Illinois). **(See Chapter III for the full set of these recommendations.)**
- Recommendations from stakeholders in the listening sessions in Jacksonville (Florida), Houston (Texas),

and Chicago (Illinois). **(See Chapter III for the full set of these recommendations.)**

Summary Recommendations

- Incentives should be provided to states to encourage them to implement the optional provisions of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP).

For example, under the CFCIP, states have the option of extending Medicaid health insurance coverage to all youth in foster care until their 21st birthday. Fully implementing this option would end the practice in states such as Florida of extending Medicaid coverage until the 21st birthday of youth in the Road-to-Independence program (a program that provides financial supports for youth pursuing post-high school educational or vocational training as a means to achieve their independence) but providing this coverage until the age of 19 for other youth in the state foster care program.

- Extend all transitional services to children in guardianship living arrangements.

While the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 that established the CFCIP extends the services available to youth formerly in foster care, it does not extend these to youth with legal guardians. For example, services offered through Independent Living programs to children who have been adopted, or who were involved in the foster care system at age 16, or who aged out of care at age 18 years are not available to children who are in subsidized guardianship and, thus, are not a part of the foster care system.

... The new federal Chafee Education and Training Voucher Program, for example, specifically makes youth who were adopted from foster care at or after age 16 eligible for its assistance. Unfortunately, the program is not available to those who achieve permanency through guardianship.¹⁴⁰

Guardianship relationships afford children and youth a permanency option that needs to be supported at no lesser level than adoption or when they are living independently.¹⁴¹

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- Review the nature of funding streams from the federal to state governments for services to youth in foster care and assess whether service provision could be improved by modifying funding mechanisms.

For example, the Transitional Living Program is supported by time-limited competitive grant funding which is, by its definition, not available to all states each year. How does the uncertainty in this funding stream influence the number, nature, and quality of services provided to youth in foster care systems around the nation? What is the best way to provide a consistent level of funding for this program to localities around the nation to meet the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care? Examining and perhaps restructuring the funding streams for the nation's foster care systems could provide a stable stream of financial resources and better address the needs of youth.

- Establish standards for data collection about youth in foster care systems around the country.

Although the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 that established the CFCIP mandates the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop outcome measures and data elements to track state performance on outcomes, regulations to implement this mandate have not yet been put into place. Thus, in the interim many states either collect data using differing and non-comparable formats and methods. A regulation to comply with this mandate has been placed in the *Federal Register* for comment.

- Review the nature of and barriers to health care services received by youth in the foster care system.

Although all states make Medicaid or comparable health insurance coverage available to youth in foster care, it would be useful to know the types of needed services this health insurance coverage actually makes available to youth. One might expect that youth in foster care would experience some of the same barriers and challenges in accessing needed services as other enrollees in public insurance plans such as Medicaid.¹⁴² Medicaid expenditures, however, for youth in the foster care system are greater for some services—such as mental health and substance

abuse treatments—than among youth not in the foster care system.¹⁴³ It would be of value to know whether this health insurance helps youth in foster care meet their overall needs for health services.

- Consider extending the upper age for retention of youth in foster care to reflect recent neuroscientific findings about the age by which full brain maturation has taken place.

Recent neuroscientific research indicates that the human brain has not developed all the necessary cognitive skills for successful adult functioning until age 25 or 26.¹⁴⁴ This research along with the litany of hardships faced by youth who leave the foster care system at or before age 18 suggests that youth in the foster care system might benefit if the age of emancipation were raised. Numerous ways to raise the age should be considered, including one that would allow youth to leave the system at age 18 or on each annual birth date thereafter until age 26, with the option of returning to the system at any point if additional support is needed.¹⁴⁵

- Establish better working relationships between the education and child welfare systems to short-circuit the inappropriate placement into special education classes of youth in the foster care system.

Multiple placements of youth in the foster care system are also very often associated with a broken school enrollment pattern. A broken school enrollment pattern in turn is associated with youth missing out on materials taught at various grade levels and thus appearing to be suitable only for placement in special education classes. Intervention on behalf of youth in foster care when they enroll in a new school and adequate remediation could bring the youth up to grade level and, therefore, enable them to be removed from special education classes. Both the youth and the stakeholders in the three listening sessions (Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago) were especially concerned about this de facto tracking system for youth in foster care. One especially undesirable consequence of this tracking in Florida is that, upon high school completion, youth enrolled in the special education curriculum receive an ESE (Exceptional Student Education) certificate or diploma, a school completion

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document that does not facilitate further education or finding gainful employment.

Youth Recommendations

- Develop ways to screen foster parents to identify individuals who really care about youth and are not enrolling to be foster parents just for the money. One way to do this would be to recruit for foster parents among upper-income families.
- Establish greater accountability for caseworkers and sanction them if they do not keep their word to youth in the foster care system.
- Create a system by which caseworkers can be accessible on weekends to youth in foster care.
- Allow more visits for youth in foster care with their siblings and parents.
- Provide additional funding through the Chafee ETV program to enable youth to buy equipment (such as computers) needed for school.
- Provide transitional living services and life skills training to youth in their early teens, beginning at age 14.
- Establish a stable source of funding for stipends for grandparents and other relatives to enable them to care for children related to them so these youth can avoid placement in foster care.
- Via trips and outings organized by child welfare staff, provide youth in foster care greater exposure to and awareness of a variety of social situations and educational opportunities.
- Do a better job of providing information to youth in foster care about resources for which they might be eligible. Use a discussion group format for this purpose.
- Involve youth in making decisions about where they will live.

Stakeholder Recommendations

- Take steps to better identify and address the needs of mentally and physically challenged youth within the foster care system.
- License and fund grandparents and other relatives to be able to care for the children in their extended families who need parent substitutes.
- Increase the number of available foster homes and, thereby, reduce the crowdedness of these homes.
- Recruit and assign to youth in foster care parent substitutes or educational mentors who will track their school progress and advocate for them within the educational system.
- Institute greater accountability for the spending of CFCIP dollars so that more money is spent directly on the youth in foster care and less goes to other purposes.
- Establish benchmarks for youth in foster care to acquire relevant skills (such as academic skills, life skills, or vocational skills), so that fewer youth from the foster care system will wind up either in jail or homeless.

Issues and Recommendations about Experiences of Youth

The literature review, telephone survey, and listening sessions each found that youth in the foster care system experience challenges in all the arenas most commonly used to assess maturation from adolescence to adulthood and readiness to successfully function as an adult. Major findings and recommendations from our reconnaissance are presented below for the following areas:

- community connections and supportive relationships,
- education,
- employment,
- health care,

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- housing, and
- juvenile justice.

Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

Published research about youth in the foster care system finds that these youth are more likely to be socially isolated than youth who have not experienced foster care.¹⁴⁶ Many of the youth themselves—especially in the Jacksonville, Florida, listening session—confirmed this assessment when they indicated that they lacked trusted, supportive relationships with any adults. The frequency with which youth in foster care complained about the failure of the state to give stipends to their grandparents to care for them suggests a key reason why youth in the foster care systems of our nation lack trusted supportive relationships with any adults. Youth in foster care have been removed from the extended family setting in which many are able to find an adult with whom they could have such a relationship. In addition, the survey finding that the inability to bond or form attachments is the major consequence of the all-too-common multiple placements of youth suggests that their tenure in foster care may work directly against the development of supportive relationships.

Other survey findings offer different reasons for the inability of youth in foster care to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult. Nearly three of every five social workers interviewed (56.8 percent) cited behavioral problems of the youth as a main reason for this inability. More than two of every five survey respondents (45.5 percent) also considered mental health issues a main reason why youth in foster care were unable to make this sort of connection. Although survey responses did not address this, some of the behavioral problems and mental health issues that may limit the ability of youth in foster care to establish permanent connections with family or trusted adults may result from the young person's reaction to their experiences in the foster care system

Recommendations

- Promote programs that encourage youth activism.

The CFCIP requires that youth become actively involved in the development of services to guide their transition to adulthood. Involving youth in the decisions about how they can achieve a successful transi-

tion to adulthood is a critical step in helping them build the necessary skills to guide their future.

... When young people are removed from the process of making decisions about their future, their feelings of isolation, dependency, and powerlessness are often reinforced. In contrast, engaging foster youth in decision making creates an environment in which they are more likely to be motivated to develop needed competencies—and in which they are also more likely to succeed in developing, or maintaining and strengthening, critical family ties.¹⁴⁷

Getting youth involved in the development of the programs or youth activism is seen as a positive step towards helping youth develop skills that aid their ability to advocate on their own behalf. Foundations such as the Surdna Foundation support “young people taking direct collective action to improve their communities and become active shapers of their own development.” Robert Sherman, the Director of the Effective Citizenry Program for the Foundation said,

... youth civic engagement involves youth directly in their development, in the improvement of youth organizations, and in crafting effective policy solutions to thorny community problems. Young people, he says, have been stepping up to the plate to propose new solutions to old problems and in doing so are reshaping how we think of them.¹⁴⁸

The Youth Circles and Foster Youth Coalition¹⁴⁹ that operate in Hawaii are examples of programs designed to incorporate the youth directly into decision making on their behalf. **(See Chapter I for additional information about the Hawaii programs.)**

- Promote community-based initiatives that support youth participation.

Some of the promising programs serving youth who are transitioning out of foster care are community-based, with youth having a stake not only in the design but also in the outcomes. Edelman, Holzer, and Offner in their recent book focus on the need to build viable community infrastructure to serve disadvantaged young men, a subset of whom may come

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from the foster care system. One program cited was the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), a multifaceted 30-year-old organization that began as an after-school and truancy prevention program but now provides job programs for youth.¹⁵⁰ The HCZ's program TRUCE (The Renaissance University for Community Education) "fosters academic growth and career readiness for 12-to-19-year-olds through activities that emphasize media literacy. Youth gain video production skills and write and produce films that have been shown at national and international film festivals."¹⁵¹ The authors suggest that it is important to offer youth access to a comprehensive network of services in their neighborhoods and for the federal government to create jobs in the communities where disadvantaged youth live.

- Develop youth service centers to provide at one site not only a range of services for youth but also the opportunity for youth to develop personal and community connections.

Some states have established youth service centers to help meet the needs of youth involved with state systems such as child welfare and juvenile justice. For example, the Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) was established as a centralized assessment/intake and referral center for transitional living services for youth leaving the foster care and juvenile justice systems in North Texas. Youth between the ages of 14 and 24 can receive supportive services from the community, government, and private agencies to help with their transition to self-sufficiency. At the TRAC, youth have access to a college representative, a vocational coordinator, and other staff to help with job search, financial aid for college or training, resume preparation, and mentoring (if desired).

- Recruit adult males as foster parents. Having an adult male as a foster parent is especially important for the development of males in the foster care system.¹⁵²
- Provide mentors for youth in the foster care system.¹⁵³
- Explore the One Church, One Child Foster God Parents Model,¹⁵⁴ implemented in Tallahassee, Florida, as a means to establish permanent supportive relationships for the youth in foster care.

Education

Many youth formerly in the foster care system fail to complete high school or to earn their GED.¹⁵⁵ In addition, many who complete high school only earn an ESE (Exceptional Student Education) certificate, or its equivalent, a document that does not facilitate either further educational attainment or obtaining gainful employment. Frequent placement in special education results in part from frequent school changes and the spotty mastery of the skills needed for advancement in a college preparatory or other high-school curriculum. Nearly half (46.5 percent) of the social workers surveyed by the Joint Center about Aging Out of Foster Care view falling behind academically as a consequence of youth in foster care changing school frequently. Frequent school changes are associated with multiple foster home placements, a circumstance cited as a major problem by 60.9 percent of the respondents to the survey conducted as part of this project.

The challenges for youth in foster care associated with the education system also are discussed in the preceding section of this synthesis, under System-Related Issues. They are mentioned here as well, with recommendations targeted to the resolution of these challenges because of the importance of this issue.

Recommendations

- Develop alternative educational opportunities for youth to complete school.

Many older youth in foster care have experienced numerous interruptions to their education. As the number of foster home placements increases so does the number of schools attended. Frequent changes in schools are associated with being behind in their grade level and failing a number of classes. Frustrated by remaining behind and seeing no way to catch up, many youth in the foster care system drop out of school at age 16 years and find themselves unable to compete for available jobs. To develop conducive learning environments for youth who are out-of-school and do not have either a high school diploma or a GED, the state of Illinois collaborates with the Alternative Schools Network in Chicago. Collaborations such as these can help to ensure that youth who cannot attend regular high schools have the option to continue their education.

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- Establish a network of adults who are educational surrogates or mentors for youth in the foster care system and whose mission is to help youth complete high school or earn a GED.

Establishing a system of educational surrogates or mentors to provide a more consistent, committed, and trained adult to support the educational needs of youth in foster care (especially for those with special needs), could encourage educational completion among youth in the foster care system. This approach is favored by many because educational success becomes the primary focus of the educational surrogates or mentors, rather than being one of the many foci that a foster parent has to maintain. These surrogates or mentors would advocate for the youth with whom they work to prevent inappropriate placements in special education, for example.

Employment

Although 81 percent of the social workers polled in the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care believe that their states provide job preparation and training to youth before they age out of foster care, even more survey respondents (85 percent) believe that unemployment is either a major or moderate problem for youth who are aging out of foster care. Research supports the perceptions of our survey respondents. Many of the youth formerly in foster care are less likely (than their peers without foster care experience) to be employed and more likely to rely on public assistance.¹⁵⁶ Youth formerly in foster care on average also earn too little to escape poverty.¹⁵⁷ These findings seem to hold more for African American youth than youth of other races/ethnicities who are in the foster care system. In particular, urban African American youth in foster care are significantly less likely than other urban youth in foster care to be employed. This is true even though urban African American youth in foster care are not significantly more likely to drop out of school than urban youth of other racial/ethnic groups also in foster care.¹⁵⁸

Recommendations

- Partnerships should be developed between the workforce development system and the child welfare system to ensure that the employment needs of youth formerly in the foster care system are not overlooked.

- Vocational training (or the funds to acquire such training) should be provided for youth in the foster care system, especially those who do not plan to go to college.¹⁵⁹
- As early as possible, expose youth in the foster care system to a wide range of career options and opportunities to provide them the motivation to get better grades as stepping stones to achieve their career goals.¹⁶⁰
- Provide mentors and support groups to help youth in the foster care system learn about, discuss, and flesh out the type of career path on which they wish to embark.¹⁶¹

Health Care

Adolescents in the foster care system are at higher risk than other youth of experiencing continuing medical problems. These problems are exacerbated by multiple foster home placements and by the lack of both continuity and recordkeeping for the medical interventions received.¹⁶² Youth formerly in foster care are more likely than other youth to have mental health problems, and to not receive adequate or appropriate care for these conditions.¹⁶³

Our survey results support the findings from the research literature. While nearly 90 percent of the respondents to the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care believe that youth in the foster care system have access to care for both physical and mental health, slightly more than half—only 52.4 percent—believe the same is true for youth who age out of the foster care system. Many of the reasons offered by the survey respondents for the lack of access to health care among youth who have aged out of the system are the same as the reasons offered for the lack of health care among other youth (especially males) in their 20s: can't afford; have a job but no health benefits; lack employment; and don't qualify for Medicaid.

Recommendation

- Extend Medicaid (or other public insurance coverage) to all youth in the foster care system at least until they turn 21. **(See Recommendations under Macro-Level Issues and Recommendations for further discussion of this issue.)**

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Housing

Compared to all young adults, youth formerly in foster care are more frequently homeless.¹⁶⁴ Among respondents to the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care, little is known about homelessness among youth aging out of the foster care system. This is true though most (63.9 percent) of the social workers surveyed believe that the state assists youth to locate, secure, and maintain housing after leaving the foster care system.

Recommendation

- Youth in the foster care system who are college students need year-round housing.¹⁶⁵

Youth in foster care who are college students have housing on campus when their campuses are open during the school year. However, when and if colleges and universities shut down for holidays or school breaks, youth who aged out of foster care without a permanent connection to family or another adult often become intermittently homeless. Although selected state programs provide college students financial assistance for housing, these programs may not enable youth to avoid this intermittent homelessness.

Juvenile Justice

Nearly 37 percent of the respondents to the Joint Center Survey about Aging Out of Foster Care believe that 30 percent or less of the youth in foster care have juvenile justice system involvement. This 37 percent is constituted as follows: Nearly 15 percent believe that the share with juvenile justice system involvement is between one percent and 10 percent, while smaller percentages believe that these shares are between 11 percent and 20 percent (10.5 percent), or between 21 percent and 30 percent (11.2 percent).

Neglect, lack of supervision, and lack of structure is the major reason given—by 35 percent, more than a third of survey respondents—for putative juvenile justice system involvement. A fourth (25.2 percent) attribute this involvement to drugs, alcohol, and substance use. More than a fifth (22.6 percent) ascribe juvenile justice system involvement to family problems, broken homes, and domestic

violence, while nearly a sixth (16 percent) peg it to the behavior of youth. About one of every eight social workers (12.8 percent) thinks that juvenile justice system involvement is due to theft, robbery, or other crimes.

Recommendations¹⁶⁶

- Make anger management therapy and other mental health interventions more readily accessible to youth in foster care. Providing a mental health intervention of this sort could not only improve the overall health and quality of life for the youth in question but also help the youth to avoid lashing out in anger in ways that can garner a criminal record for themselves.
- Caseworkers should provide more information about positive life options to youth in the foster care system before they turn age 16, to motivate them to avoid behaviors (such as truancies and felonies) that can have lifelong consequences, such as incarceration.
- Automatically expunge the juvenile crime records of youth in foster care.

Follow-On Analyses and Summary Recommendations

The reconnaissance conducted by the JCHPI and BACW to gather information about youth aging out of the foster care system revealed some of the issues that beset the system, the substitute parents for youth in care, and the youth in foster care themselves. The many informants from whom we gathered data—800 social workers interviewed for the survey about Aging Out of Foster Care, and 92 youth and 58 stakeholders convened in listening sessions—primarily shared their perspectives about how the system works in contrast to how they might like the system to work. We found that the U.S. foster care system is really multiple systems, operating under the same broad guidelines and using the same funding streams, but differing in their particulars by state and territory.

Feedback from our informants illustrated how the nation's foster care systems "on paper" differ from the way they are experienced by the youth in foster care and by their substitute parents. The comments of informants also revealed the complexity of the nation's foster care systems and that

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youth, substitute parents, and stakeholders alike often have an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the rules governing and the programs or resources available from their foster care systems.

The recommendations listed below incorporate many of the findings and more detailed recommendations made throughout this report. They also suggest approaches that might be undertaken—or considered—by philanthropic institutions to move us closer to the time when the more than 50 foster care systems in the United States all will function in a manner that enables all youth who age out of these systems to transition to a productive adulthood.

*Recommendations*¹⁶⁷

- Determine the barriers to timely receipt by youth in foster care of needed health services and devise systems to remove these barriers.
- Explore the current—and establish more effective mechanisms to provide full information to concerned parties (youth, substitute parents, stakeholders, and caseworkers) about the workings (i.e., programs, resources, and eligibility rules) of the more than 50 foster care systems in the states and territories.
- Guide/support the development of systems to collect comparable and consistent data for youth of all racial/ethnic groups in the more than 50 foster care systems.
- Conduct rigorous evaluations of programs that serve youth aging out of foster care to determine which programs work to achieve positive outcomes for youth and to identify their active ingredients so these ingredients can be included in program replications.
- Examine and identify successful models for making more durable connections between local child welfare systems and other systems/resources/funding streams (e.g., education, workforce development) that can benefit youth in the foster care system.
- Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of providing transitional services to children in guardianship care.
- Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of providing the same supports and stipends to all substitute parents (relative caregivers, guardians, and foster parents) of youth in foster care.
- Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of increasing the involvement of adult males with youth (especially male youth) in foster care.
- Implement demonstration programs to test the effectiveness of peer support groups or other types of supports (e.g., mentors). Test the utility of these supports against other methods employed to inform and engage youth in foster care and to develop transition plans for youth who are nearing the age of emancipation.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different forms of administration and service delivery for foster care systems (e.g., county versus state or city, and public versus private).
- Assess and try to meet the needs of the following vulnerable populations within the foster care systems of our nation: physically and mentally challenged youth, African American males, and pregnant or parenting youth.

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Appendix A

State Foster Care Profiles

Florida
Texas
Illinois

State Foster Care Profile: Florida

The State of Florida has experienced many of the same problems as other states in their quest to address the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care. Their youth experience multiple placements, they drop out of school and they have negative encounters with the judicial system. Like all other states, Florida prepared a plan that would be used to guide their efforts under the CFCIP to address the issues that youth face as they leave the foster care system. An overriding goal of their plan is that most children and youth will exit the foster care system to a permanent home.

In recent years, Florida has made substantial progress toward achieving the goal of permanency for youth leaving the system. In 2003, ninety (90) percent of youth exiting foster care in Florida were discharged to a permanent home. This rate exceeded the national median of 86.3 percent. Of the youth who exited the system because of emancipation (either through legal action or because they reached the age of majority), more than one quarter (26.9 percent) had entered foster care when they were age 12 or younger. In 2003, a total of 820 youth were age 18 or older at the time of their exit from Florida's foster care system.¹⁶⁸ In fiscal year 2004-05 there were 17,705 youth in foster care. During August 2005, a total of 7,627 youth between the ages of 13 and 17 years inclusive received pre-independent living services. In addition, aftercare and transition services were provided to 1,929 youth formerly in foster care aged 22 and younger.¹⁶⁹

Services to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Youth in Florida have access to the Independent Living Transition Service Program provided by the state Department of Children and Families (DCF) through a network of community-based providers. The program provides services to help foster youth transition from state-sponsored care to living independently as productive citizens. It offers financial assistance to former foster youth to pay for education and living expenses.¹⁷⁰

Florida Demographics	
Children under age 18 (statewide), 2003*	3,924,123
Children (under age 21) in Foster Care on 9/30/03 **	30,677
White(non-Hispanic)	45.8%
Black(non-Hispanic)	42.4%
Hispanic	9.0%
Other	2.8%
Youth formerly in foster care, ages 18-22, who received services in 2005-2006 ***	3,806
* Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report., p.130. ** Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report., p.131. *** Florida Independent Living Services Advisory Council, 2006 Report of Independent Living Services	

To address a key provision of the Chafee legislation—to provide financial aid to youth for certain educational and other self-sufficiency services—the Florida legislature authorized funding for three programs.

- Aftercare funding (up to \$1,000 per year) is made available for emergencies to youth until they reach age 23. These funds are specifically earmarked for addressing the problems of homelessness among former foster youth.¹⁷¹
- The Road-to-Independence Program provides funds (up to \$10,704 per year) to youth formerly in foster care funds for educational or vocational training to support their independence. Since youth formerly in foster care are exempt from paying in-state tuition at any state school, if they choose to attend these schools, the funds available through CFCIP can be used to pay for rent, utilities, or other expenses.
- Transitional Support Services provide up to \$5,000 per year in funding to youth up to age 23, if they were in foster care on their 18th birthday. These funds can be used for job training or for other activities related to achieving self-sufficiency.

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As a part of their preparation for independence youth are assisted through life skills training, tutoring, field trips, college tours, and help with applications for colleges. In general, the youth in foster care are supported in whatever ways are necessary to help them take advantage of the available CFCIP services. In addition, the Florida Program Improvement Plan, a strategic plan to enhance the implementation of CFCIP in Florida, calls for “a comprehensive review of children with the permanency goal of another permanent planned living arrangement. Behavior analysts are assigned to work with teens in family and group care settings to resolve conflicts with caregivers and in school settings. These behavior analysts help identify attachment figures in children’s lives and help provide incentives for youth to improve their behaviors.”¹⁷²

Health Care

Under Florida law, young adults in foster care can receive Medicaid coverage through age 19. Young adults who qualify for and are awarded financial assistance under the Road-to-Independence program, however, are eligible for Medicaid health insurance coverage as long as they are between the ages of 18 and 20. Thus, scholarship recipients are eligible to receive Medicaid benefits until they reach age 21 or are terminated from the scholarship program.¹⁷³

Employment Services

The Florida DCF works in conjunction with the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation to provide employment services for youth. Through this collaborative relationship technical assistance is provided to staff and local resources have been developed to provide employment and training services. Life skills classes specific to employment are delivered in each local area across Florida using different delivery models. Courses are designed to cover sixteen categories of youth development skills established by Daniel Memorial, Inc.,¹⁷⁴ including job seeking skills, personal appearance, interpersonal skills, and transportation.¹⁷⁵ Daniel Memorial, Inc.’s Independent Living Skills System is a “software assisted, systematic, competency-based approach to life skills training. The system combines timesaving technology with a comprehensive assessment and reporting package to produce skill plans and transition plans tailored to the individual needs.”¹⁷⁶ This computerized

assessment system enables staff to not only produce each plan more quickly but also tailor it to the youth’s individualized needs.

Assessment of Services

In their December 2005 review of the Independent Living Transition Services Program, the Florida Office of Program Policy and Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPAGA) assessed the educational and employment outcomes as of June 30, 2004, for youth ages 13-22 who were currently and formerly in the foster care system. Most potentially eligible youth did not receive independent living services. During the 2003-2004 school year, this review found the following for youth between the ages of 13 and 17:

- Youth in foster care had poorer educational outcomes than their age peers not in foster care;
- 38% of the youth in foster care changed schools at least once, compared to 7% of the general population;
- Youth in foster care “disproportionately had disabilities that hampered their learning”;
- Youth in foster care experienced higher rates of school disciplinary problems that qualified them for the drop-out prevention programs than did youth not in foster care;
- Youth in foster care had “higher rates of homelessness, which may have contributed to low academic achievement.”¹⁷⁷

The OPPAGA used the findings of this evaluation as a baseline for training staff to address the deficiencies within Florida’s foster care system. To assist staff in addressing the issues affecting the youth and to support the work that is being done to help youth transition to adulthood, the Florida DCF uses the National Resource Center for Youth Development to provide training to sensitize staff to the issues that shape youth development. Florida also routinely generates reports from their data system to assess the effectiveness of their services and to focus on changes where most needed.

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In addition, the Florida legislature charged the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (ILSAC) with the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the independent living transition services. Florida has focused much of its attention on ensuring that education and employment objectives were being integrated into the transitional services across the state. The 2006 ILSAC report highlighted accomplishments such as engaging community agencies to deliver these services to youth in foster care. The ILSAC saw this as a way to encourage innovation and to enhance community awareness of and interest in youth in foster care. They also identified additional work that the Department of Children and Families needed to do to improve services to youth including:

- Developing a program planning and delivery and reporting tool to provide more accurate data on outcomes and fiscal implications;
- “Developing a centralized clearinghouse for approved technical assistance, training, resources, and best practices for all stakeholders on all issues pertinent to independent living”; and
- Supporting the development and implementation of a transitional living or subsidized independent living housing experience, for youth aging out of foster care at age 17 who do not have the option of remaining in a foster family home or in a group home.¹⁷⁸

State Foster Care Profile: Texas

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is responsible for the services provided to youth transitioning out of the foster care system. Services are primarily funded through the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) and the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program. The Texas program is called Preparation for Adult Living (PAL). First implemented in 1986, the mission of the PAL program is to:

... ensure that older youth in substitute care are prepared for their inevitable departure from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ care and support. ... PAL services include involvement in programs aimed at improving youths’ self-esteem and improving their ability to make responsible decisions

... [while helping] youth face the challenges of adulthood and independence. PAL policy requires that youth 16 and older who are in substitute care receive services to prepare them for adult living. Subject to funding availability, regions may serve any youth 14 or older for whom there is an active Child Protective Service open case.¹⁷⁹

The state is divided into five districts within which there are eleven regions, with PAL staff located in each. Services available to youth are provided by private agencies and organizations. Foster parents are encouraged to help the youth in their care to get assistance with developing their job skills, education or other training for employment.

In each year since 2003, the number of youth participating in the PAL program has increased. In fiscal year 2003, a total of 4,921 youth ages 16 through 20, and 663 youth ages 14 and 15 received services from the PAL program.¹⁸⁰ In FY 2004, a total of 5,341 youth ages 16 to 20 were served, along with 534 youth ages 14 and 15.¹⁸¹ A total of 6,474 youth ages 16-20 and 688 youth ages 14 and 15 participated in PAL in FY 2005. In FY 2006, of the 7,884

Texas Demographics					
Children under age 18 (statewide), 2003*					6,240,162
Children (under age 21) in Foster Care on 9/30/03 **					22,191
White(non-Hispanic)					33.2%
Black(non-Hispanic)					25.6%
Hispanic					36.8%
Other					4.4%
Youth served by Independent Living Program (age & race), FY 2006***					
	AA	H	White	Other	Total
16-20	2,156	2,362	2,637	126	7,281
* Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report, p.410.					
** Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report, p.411.					
***Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us					

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youth between the ages of 16 and 20 years eligible for PAL services, most of them—more than 92 percent—were served.¹⁸²

Services to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Independent Living Skills

Independent Living Skills Assessment is required for each youth 16 years of age for the purpose of developing a specific plan and training to prepare the youth for adult living. The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Tool¹⁸³ is used to complete assessments of youth. This instrument is used to assess youth abilities in different domains such as communication, daily living, housing, money, work and study habits, social relationships, and their ability to care for themselves. The “DFPS has an agreement with the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission to provide life skills training to Title IV-E-eligible youth who are 16 years of age and older placed into foster care by a county juvenile probation department. The DFPS will provide Chafee aftercare services to Title IV-E JPC youth who meet all eligibility criteria.”¹⁸⁴

Independent Living Skills Training is available to provide youth with personal and interpersonal skills, job skills training, housing and transportation, health care, and future planning and money management skills. Support services are available to help with college preparation, high school graduation expenses, mentoring, GED classes, and vocational assessment or training.

When youth leave foster care, financial assistance is available as Aftercare Room and Board Assistance (rent, utilities, and food) and in the form of a Transitional Living Allowance. Aftercare Room and Board Assistance has a total cap of \$3,000 of accumulated payments per eligible youth. A maximum of \$500 can be received each month. There is a limit of \$1,000 per eligible client for the Transitional Living Allowance, and youth cannot receive more than \$500 at one time.¹⁸⁵ A total of 838 youth received Transitional Living Allowances in fiscal year 2006.¹⁸⁶

In addition to these direct services the State of Texas offers experiential camps, teen conferences, college weekend tours, and leadership committees such as the Statewide Youth Leadership Committee (Youth Advisory Board), a vehicle for youth to express their views about services and policies.¹⁸⁷

Transitional Medicaid

The Department of Family and Protective Services implemented the expanded Medicaid provision of the Chafee legislation in September 2001. Under the Texas program youth are eligible to receive transitional medical services if they: are ages 18 through 20, are U.S. citizens, have aged out of foster care at age 18 or older, have no resources valued at more than \$10,000, and meet the Texas Department of Human Services income guidelines.¹⁸⁸ Youth must call annually to renew transitional Medicaid coverage, for which they are eligible until they become 21 years of age.

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

Under the ETV program, youth currently or formerly in foster care may receive financial assistance not to exceed \$5,000 annually which can be used for any of the following: housing, room and board, personal items, transportation needs and items such as computers or books and supplies. This assistance is available to youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who have a high school diploma (or the equivalent) and are enrolled at least part-time (6 hours) and attending a public or non-profit program that provides a bachelor's degree. Age-eligible youth may receive benefits if also enrolled in a program that lasts at least two years and provides credit toward a degree or certification. Youth participating in the ETV program on their 21st birthday can continue to receive program benefits until their 23rd birthday, as long as they are making satisfactory progress toward completing their postsecondary education or training program.

In addition, youth who are in “DFPS substitute care on or after their 18th birthday, or who obtain their high school diploma or its equivalent while they are in foster or other residential care, may attend state-supported vocational schools, colleges, and universities with tuition and fees waived. Youth who are adopted from foster care or who are eligible for adoption at age 14 or older also may be eligible for the waiver.”¹⁸⁹

State Foster Care Profile: Illinois

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has been responsible for administering child welfare services, including services to youth transitioning out of foster care, as far back as 1990 when they introduced policies to serve youth who were transitioning from state

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Illinois Demographics					
Children under age 18 (statewide), 2004*					3,238,150
Children in Foster Care on (age & race) as of 12/06/06**					
	AA	H	White	Other	
0-15	8,052	789	4,870	367	
16-21	3,488	282	1,130	79	
Total	11,540	1,071	6,000	446	
19,057					
*Data obtained from CWLA National Data Analysis System-2004					
**Data obtained from the Illinois DCFS Division of Service Intervention (12/6/06)					

care. In 1999, when the legislation enacting the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) was passed, the DCFS took advantage of the increased resources to expand its program and services to foster care youth through age 21.

... It is the Department's position that all youth in placement, regardless of their permanency goals will be provided developmental activities and support services designed to enhance and monitor their development of skills for independent living. Transition planning for adolescents for whom neither family reunification, subsidized guardianship, nor adoption is an option must be an ongoing process beginning with an assessment of the adolescent's needs and allowing for input from the youth, caregiver, teachers, counselors, youth's family, and caseworkers. ...¹⁹⁰

Educational and training services form the baseline resource provided to youth in the Illinois foster care system.

The population in foster care in Illinois has dropped from a high of 51,000 youth in 1997 to 19,057 youth in 2006.¹⁹¹ This dramatic reduction resulted from an intense effort to accelerate reunification along with an emphasis on adoption and legal guardianship. Illinois was also approved as a demonstration state for subsidized guardianship in 1996. As a demonstration state they received federal reimbursement for subsidies paid to relative caregivers and foster parents

who became guardians for children in foster care who also were removed from agency custody.¹⁹²

During the same period that the overall population in foster care in Illinois declined, however, the mix of older and younger youth in foster care shifted. Between March 1997 and March 2002, "the percentage of youth ages 14 and older in substitute care climbed from 20 percent to 30 percent. This shift [reflected] the differences in permanency dynamics for older and younger children; younger children [were] adopted more often than older children. Between 11% and 13% of youth in care [did] not achieve permanency before the age of majority and [instead aged] out of the child welfare system after their 18th birthday."¹⁹³

In 1997 and 1998, the DCFS also introduced two initiatives that had an impact on outcomes for youth in foster care. Performance-based contracting and the permanency initiative changed the way the agency conducted business with private child welfare agencies by "defining desired permanency outcomes and holding agencies accountable for achieving such outcomes."¹⁹⁴ Agencies are paid a fixed amount each month per worker caseload and are expected to move approximately one-third of the children to permanent placements each year and accept an equal number of new referrals.¹⁹⁵ The 8,747 African American youth who exited care—29 percent were adopted and 42 percent were re-unified in fiscal year 1998—may reflect the implementation of these initiatives.¹⁹⁶ Of specific interest and likely a factor in the high number of African American children that left care during this period was that most of their caregivers were relatives.

But in spite of this drop in the number of children in care, the issue of reaching and serving the remaining youth—especially youth in care after age eighteen—were of concern. From a follow up study by Chapin Hall, the DCFS learned more about the disparity in services to youth remaining in care after age 18 between those who live in the Cook County area and those who live downstate. The follow-up analysis found that:

- "87 percent of the young adults in the Cook County sample were still in care at age 19, compared to only 42 percent of the young adults downstate;
- Those still in care and those in Cook County were more likely to have received independent

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living services such as educational, vocational, and employment services;

- 66 percent of those still in care were enrolled in a school or training program, compared to only 20 percent of those not in care;
- Youth in care held jobs for longer periods of time than those not in care, and were likely to earn a higher wage;
- Those in care experienced fewer economic hardships;
- Youth no longer in care were more than twice as likely to have been hospitalized in the last year, and were less likely to receive health and mental health services ... ;
- Females no longer in care were almost twice as likely (62 percent vs. 32 percent) to have become pregnant in the last two years; and
- Over the past two years, youth no longer in care (compared to those still in care) were almost twice as likely to have been arrested, and more than three times as likely to have been convicted of a crime.¹⁹⁷

These findings led Illinois to seek help in developing a strategy for addressing these outcome disparities for youth in foster care. Illinois was selected by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Academy to participate in a demonstration project on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care. This opportunity is being used to focus on systemic barriers that may be contributing to these disparate outcomes, and to make changes that improve the results for youth in the downstate area.¹⁹⁸

Services to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

The Illinois CFCIP includes educational assistance, employment services, life skills assessments, training and placement services and other support opportunities. The Illinois DCFS, like the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, uses the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment procedures,¹⁹⁹ with its youth in foster care. In both jurisdictions this assessment tool is being used because they believe that it enables staff to develop more clearly defined

transition plans for youth working towards self-sufficiency. A life skills assessment is required for all youth at age 14 regardless of their permanency goal, as well as “six months prior to the youth’s planned discharge from guardianship.”²⁰⁰ These assessments are used as a guidance tool for case-workers and the caregiver. The individual plan includes the transitional service activities that the youth will be involved in while moving to independence. Life skills training is provided by private contractors that operate around the state.

While they remain in agency custody, youth in Illinois are eligible for Medicaid coverage until their 21st birthday. If a youth leaves care at age 18 the youth will remain eligible for Medicaid for 12 additional months.²⁰¹

In Illinois under the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, educational services are made available to youth between the ages of 16 and 22 years who are in foster care, are transitioning out of care, or were adopted after their 16th birthday. Benefits provided by the ETV program include up to \$5,000 per youth per year for school-related expenses.²⁰² This money can be applied to tuition and fees (including fees that school financial aid does not cover), room and board, books, uniforms, supplies, transportation, equipment, or tuition to in- or out-of-state vocational training certificate programs. These services are available to youth in Illinois until they reach their 23rd birthday. Educational services are made available through collaboration among the DCFS, the Office of Education and Transition Services, the Statewide Youth Advisory Board, and external stakeholders.

In addition, youth enrolled in postsecondary education can get assistance from two DCFS programs—the Youth in College/Vocational Training Program and the Youth in Scholarship Program. The Youth in College/Vocational Training Program was introduced in 1990 to support DCFS students attending state or private universities, or community colleges. The Youth in Scholarship program is a competitive college scholarship that awards 48 scholarships annually. It is open to all DCFS current wards and former wards who left care through guardianship or adoption.

In fiscal year 2006, these programs served 588 youth and 177 youth, respectively. Youth in these two programs also receive a monthly stipend of \$444.85. To further interest in and the use of these programs, the staff of the Office of Education and Transition Services in the DCFS delivered 14 Regional Youth Summits during the spring of 2006 to

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educate front line caseworkers about programs available to youth. Each Summit included a youth panel from each region who discussed the barriers they confronted, how they overcame them, and how workers could better “connect” with older youth.²⁰³

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Appendix B

Aging Out of Foster Care Survey Methodology Questionnaire

Aging Out of Foster Care Survey: Methodology

The survey was designed and the questionnaire developed at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Questionnaire development was informed by a meeting of stakeholders in the field of child welfare that was convened at the Joint Center on January 11, 2007. Findings from a review of both relevant literature and other questionnaires related to the subject matter also informed survey design and development.

The survey results are based upon telephone interviews with 800 social workers conducted between February 13 and April 5, 2007, for the Joint Center by Research America (a survey management firm based in Philadelphia, PA). The respondents were randomly selected from a sampling frame of 18,000 social workers and were interviewed at their place of work. After the initial call, at least eight “call-backs” were made to complete an interview. The average length of each interview was 25 minutes. The overall survey completion rate was 65 percent, a rate viewed as quite for telephone surveys.

Since this survey was based upon sampling from a list of 18,000 social workers, the generality of the results depends on how broadly that list captures the experiences of social workers and their knowledge of foster care in the U.S. The sampling frame is fairly large relative to the sample, and statistics from large surveys are robust with respect to their assumptions. Thus, if the sampling frame approximates this larger population of social workers in the U.S., the results of this survey can be interpreted with a statistical margin of error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

Aging Out Of Foster Care Survey: Questionnaire

1. What types of services does your organization provide?

2. Is your organization private or public (governmental)?
3. About how many youth 14 years and older served by your organization are in foster care?
4. Does your organization work with other providers to meet the needs of youth in foster care?
5. How would you characterize the resources available for the local foster care system? Would you say they are excellent, good, only fair or poor? (IF EXCELLENT OR GOOD, GO TO Q6)
- 5a. (IF FAIR OR POOR): Do you say that because there is too little money, because of bureaucratic rules, or for some other reason?
6. Are the youth in foster care with whom you work from an urban area, suburban area, small town, or rural area?
7. In your location is foster care administered by the state, county, or local government?
8. In your location is foster care administered by public agencies, private agencies, or both public and private agencies?
9. Are the youth in foster care with whom you work mostly white, black, Hispanic, or from a variety of racial and ethnic groups?
10. About what percentage of the youth in foster care with whom you work are male?
11. In your experience, what percentage of youth in foster care are or have been involved with the juvenile justice system?
- 11a. In your experience, what are the three main reasons why these youth become involved with the juvenile justice system?
- 11b. Of those three, what is the most important reason?
12. In your experience, what percentage of youth in foster care are runaways before entering the system?
- 12a. What percentage become runaways after entering the system?

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13. Does your state maintain youth in the foster care system beyond the age of 18?

13a. (IF YES): To what age?

14. What are the requirements for youth receiving foster care services beyond 18?

14a. Completing secondary education

14b. Post secondary education

14c. Job Corp

14d. Vocational Training

14e. Special needs (emotional/mental/physical)

15. In your state, if a youth voluntarily leaves foster care before age 18, can they be re-admitted to the system?

16. What services does your state provide for youth who exit foster care prior to age 18 without an approved placement?

I'm going to read you a list of support services for youth in the foster care system. Does your state provide these support services to these youth before they age-out of the system?

17a. Basic life-skills building, including consumer education and instruction in budgeting, using credit, housekeeping, menu planning, and food preparation.

17b. Interpersonal skill building, including enhancing young people's abilities to establish positive relationships with peers and adults, make decisions, and manage stress.

17c. Educational opportunities, such as GED preparation, postsecondary training, or vocational education.

17d. Assistance in job preparation and attainment, such as career counseling and job placement.

17e. Education, information, and counseling to prevent, treat, and reduce substance abuse.

17f. Mental health care, including individual and group counseling.

17g. Physical health care, including routine physicals, health assessments, and emergency treatment.

17h. Assist older teens in identifying and establishing a relationship with a relative or another adult who is interested in maintaining a significant relationship once the youth ages out of the foster care system.

18. Does your state provide any of these services to youth after they age-out of the foster care system? (IF NO, GO TO Q19)

18a. (IF YES): Which services are provided?

19. What services are provided to foster parents caring for youth aging-out of foster care in your state?

19.1 Are the services provided to guardians caring for youth aging-out of foster care the same as provided to foster parents? (IF YES, GO TO Q19.2)

19.1a (IF NO): Please tell me the differences?

19.2 Are the services provided to relative caregivers caring for youth aging-out of foster care the same as provided to foster parents? (IF YES, GO TO Q20)

19.2a (IF NO): Please tell me the differences?

20. Which of the following services are provided to pregnant or parenting foster care youth?

20.1a Prenatal care and counseling

20.1b Parenting skill building

20.1c Childcare

20.2 Are these services also offered to pregnant or parenting youth who are aging out of foster care?

21. In your state, is there a plan for children born to youth in foster care?

22. In your state, are pregnant youth or youth with children forced to leave the foster care system earlier than those without children?

23. In your state, do pregnant youth or youth with children qualify for independent living arrangements earlier than 18?

24. In your state, are there any services for youth in foster care who become fathers?

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24.1 What services are provided?

25. Please rate the following federal programs according to the scope and quality of the benefits they provide. Are they excellent, good, only fair or poor?

25.1 The John F. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

25.2 The Education Training and Voucher Program

25.3 The Federal Transitional Living Program

26. In your experience, what percentage of the youth in foster care graduate from high school or receive a GED?

27. Are white youth in foster care more or less likely to graduate from high school or receive a GED than black youth?

28. In your experience, what percentage of the youth in foster care attend college?

29. Are white youth in foster care more or less likely to attend college than black youth?

30. What do you think are the three most important differences between the experiences of black and white youth in foster care?

31. In your experience, how much of a problem are multiple placements for youth in foster care? Would you say they are a major problem, a moderate problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

32. What are the main reasons you think some youth go through multiple placements in foster care?

Poor Placement
Mental Health Issues
Behavioral Problems
Gender (Easier for Females than Males)

33. Are multiple placements more of a problem for white youth in foster care or black youth in foster care?

34. What do you think is the most important consequence for children who go through multiple placements?

35. In your experience, how many times does the average youth in foster care change schools?

35a. In your experience, what are the three main reasons why these youth change schools?

35b. Of those three, what is the most important reason?

36. What do you think is the most important consequence for children of frequently changing schools?

37. In your experience, would you say white youth in foster care are more or less likely than black youth to frequently change schools? (IF NO, GO TO Q38)

37a. (IF YES): Why do you think that happens?

Now, I'd like to ask some questions about youth aging-out of foster care.

38. In your experience, what percentage of youth who age-out of foster care have a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult?

38a. What are the main reasons you think some youth are unable to establish a permanent connection with family or a trusted adult?

Poor Placement
Mental Health Issues
Behavioral Problems
Gender (Easier for Females than Males)

39. In your experience, do most youth who age out of foster care have access to health care? (IF YES, GO TO Q40)

39a. (IF NO): Why do they not have access to health care?

40. In your experience, what percentage of youth who age out of foster care become homeless?

41. Does your state assist youth aging-out of foster care in locating, securing, and maintaining transitional housing or permanent housing, or retaining permanent housing with the provision of rental subsidies?

42. In your state, do you know of any initiatives to end homelessness that specifically target youth aging out of foster care?

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43. How big a problem is unemployment for youth aging out of foster care? Is it a major problem, a moderate problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

44. What efforts do child services' agencies in your state undertake to help unemployed youth who are in the process of aging-out of the foster care system?

45. Does your state have a matched savings account program, where the states match the monies foster youth earn while working? (IF NO, GO TO END)

45.1 (IF YES) In your experience, what percentage of youth aging-out of the foster care system take advantage of the matched saving account program?

45.2 What are the barriers to these youth participating in the matched savings account program?

INTERVIEWER: RECORD STATE

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Appendix C

Listening Sessions: Methodology **Listening Sessions Participants** **Youth Listening Sessions—Discussion Questions** **Stakeholders' Questionnaire** **Youth Survey Form**

Listening Sessions: Methodology

Three sets of listening sessions were conducted by Black Administrators in Child Welfare Inc. (BACW)—in Jacksonville, Florida (January 27, 2007), Houston, Texas (February 24, 2007), and Chicago, Illinois (April 21, 2007). In Jacksonville, the community host for the listening session was Mad Dads (Men Against Destruction—Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorder). The community hosts in Houston were the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and the University of Houston; the hosts for the Chicago listening sessions were the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services and the Hyde Park Career Academy.

A listening session is a facilitated small-group discussion whose purpose is to elicit the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants. Thus, the role of the facilitator is to solicit information from the group members rather than to provide input to the group. At each site youth currently or formerly in the foster care system (and between the ages of 14 and 22) and stakeholders in the foster care system participated in separate listening sessions. (See list of the stakeholders in this Appendix.) All the stakeholders were convened in a single listening session in each city. However, the number of youth listening sessions varied. In Jacksonville, the 29 youth²⁰⁴ participants were convened in two concurrent listening sessions, with 14 in one session and 15 in the other. In Houston, four listening sessions accommodated 41 youth participants. Three sessions included 10 youth each, and the remaining 11 youth participated in another session. In Chicago, the 22 youth took part in a single listening session.

Different sets of questions were used to direct the discussions in the youth and stakeholder listening sessions. (See questions used in the listening sessions in this Appendix.) Across the three sites, however, the same questions were

used for all the youth listening sessions and for all the stakeholder listening sessions. The youth in each listening session also completed a survey form to provide their basic demographic and educational information. (See Youth Survey form in this Appendix.)

All the listening sessions were held concurrently (in the afternoon) and lasted either 45 minutes (in Illinois) or 90 minutes (Jacksonville and Houston). Each session had a facilitator and at least one recorder. (Each session in Texas had a facilitator and two recorders.) The stakeholder listening sessions in each of the three cities were facilitated by Anita Marshall of BACW. The youth listening sessions in each site were facilitated by social work professionals who received instruction about the format and process from Ms. Marshall. The only exception to this was one of the four youth listening sessions in Houston which was facilitated by Micheal Helm, the luncheon speaker at that event.

Youth were selected for participation in the listening sessions by a contact person at the child welfare agencies in each of the three cities. In Jacksonville, the agency liaison used caseworkers and staff in the independent living programs to identify youth participants. In Houston, child welfare workers in the Planning for Adult Living (PAL) program posted and mailed flyers and accepted volunteers who met the criteria for participating—having foster care system experience, being male, being African American, and being between the ages of 14 and 22. In Chicago, the child welfare agency liaison sent e-mail to their service providers asking them to designate females to participate in the listening session. A conscious decision was made to have only males participate in two of the three sets of listening sessions and to have females in one listening session, for comparison.

Each state liaison was asked what the local culture dictated as appropriate inducements for youth who were giving up part of a Saturday to participate in such an event. The suggestion of gift cards and a luncheon was unanimous across the three sites. One site (Houston) went above and beyond the gift cards and luncheon, by also providing for the youth a morning of activities at the University Center at the University of Houston. The game room was rented so youth could play pool and video games and engage in other activities prior to the luncheon. Participants in the Houston youth listening sessions also had the option of taking a tour of the university while they were there.

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Listening Session Participants: Jacksonville, Florida*

- Jim Adams – CEO Family Support Services of North Florida – 904-421-5800 – jim.adams@fssnf.org
Website: www.FSSJAX.org
- Joyce Audkin – Foster Parent
- Jim Beatty – Mad Dads
- Leslie Blackshear – Foster Parent Association
- Congresswoman Corrine Brown (representative from her office)
- Joy Burgess – University of Florida/ Pediatric Nurse and teacher
- Devera De Costa – Foster Parent
- Donald Foy – President of the Jacksonville chapter of Mad Dads, Incorporated (an affiliate of BACW) – 904-534-9493 – jax@maddads.org
- Audrey Gibson – Florida House of Representatives
- Paulette Glover – One Church One Child/ Foster Grandparent Initiative
- Patrick Hadley and wife – Mad Dads
- Micah Gray – Youth Speaker
- Tony Hill – Florida State Legislature/ Head of Fla. Black Caucus
- Glorious Johnson – City Council Representative at Large District 5 – 904-630-1387
- Regina Littlejohn – Staff
- Joanne Lipp – Family Support Services / Board and GAL
- Troy Nichols – Independent Living Coordinator – Family Support Services of North Florida – 904-421-5823 – Troy.Nichols@fssnf.org
- Eddie Staton – National President and Jacksonville Vice President, Mad Dads – 904-233-8745 – estaton@gatewaycommunity.com
- Dee Wilson – Foster Parent Association

* Partial list of participants

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Listening Session Participants: Houston, Texas

- Nikki Ambush
- Warrick Baker
- Dr. Beatrice Beasley
- R. Charlz Bellard
- Caroline Bogues
- Robert Brewer
- Rachel Brownlee
- Claudia Cardenas
- Bernadette Cashin
- James Castille
- Lovenia Chapman
- Vicky Coffee-Fletcher – CPS Division Administrator for Family Focus – Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) - 512-438-4747 – Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us
- Tabitha Conway
- Mike Cutaia
- Carita Davis
- Eugene Davis
- Monique Davis
- Tonjolia Davis
- Delvin Dewalt
- Judy Earls
- Robbie Evans – Urban Experience – University of Houston- 713-743-6032
- Virginia Flores
- Deborah Green
- Antonio Head
- Micheal Helm – Senior Director of Merchandising for SYSCO Corporation – Youth Speaker
- Candice Holmes – Transitional Living Specialist – DFPS - 512-438-2350
- Joyce James
- Minnie Jasso-Myles
- Faith Johnson
- Randy Joiner
- Maxine Jones-Robinson
- Isaac Laryea
- Misha LeDay
- Dr. Elwyn C. Lee
- Roxanne Maye
- Sherea McKenzie
- Tara Owens
- Debra Page
- Imogen Papadopoulos
- Cedric Payton
- Linda Robinson
- Chadwick Sapenter
- Gabby Valladeres
- Gaye Vopat – DFPS – 512-663-8615- GAYE VOPAT@DFPS.STATE.TX.US
- Pam Walker – Houston Regional Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Coordinator- PAM.WALKER@dfps.state.tx.us

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Listening Session Participants: Chicago, Illinois*

- Erwin McEwen – Acting Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)
- Valerie Davis, Associate Deputy Director DCFS – 312-793-6068 – Valerie.F.Davis@illinois.gov
- Annetta Wilson – Exec. Director, SANKOFA Safe Child Institute – 773-542-8634 - Wsafechild@sbcglobal.net
- Linda Murray – Vice Principal, Hyde Park Career Academy – 773-535-0890
- Terry Soloman – Illinois African American Family Commission
- Antoine Turpeau – Coordinator, Youth Advisory Board – 312-663-3574
- Ashley Patterson – Student Youth Advisory Board, Vice- President – 773-301-0553 – acpatte@yahoo.com - Youth Speaker

* Partial list of participants

Youth Listening Sessions – Discussion Questions

These questions are divided into domains of living and as far as possible should be addressed in domain order unless events require a different method. We are trying to be consistent in our collection of information across all three states. These questions are suggestions. The most important ones are bold and in CAPS except in Community Connections... Community Connections and Supportive Relationships appear to be the most important and least emphasized area of their lives

Community Connections and Supportive Relationships

- Is the Jacksonville area home to you, do you have roots here?
- Do you think that you will remain here after you are independent?
- Do you have sisters, brothers, aunts, cousins, and grandparents in the area? If yes, how often do you see them? Who makes it possible for you to see them?
- Who is the adult in your life that you trust above all others/that is there for you most of the time? Or whose name do you put on emergency cards at school, work, hospital, etc?
- How did you come to know this person? (Family, foster parent, social worker, mentor, probation officer, judge, CASA/GAL, law enforcer).
- How has that person made a difference in your life? Has that person helped to make you who you are today
- After you are independent (18 or older) will that person still be available to you, and in what ways?
- What kinds of community connections do you have and what kinds do you think you need? (Family, extended family, friends, mentors etc)

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- What do you know about other youth leaving foster care that do not have such a person/people in their lives?
- How can all of us do better at helping all youth in care have lasting and strong family and community connections?

Education and Career Planning

- What is the job that you see yourself succeeding at? How did you arrive at that decision?
- Who is/has been helping you to achieve that goal? How are they doing that?
- WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU THINK THAT YOU NEED TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL?
ARE ANY OF THEM AVAILABLE TO YOU?
- Has anyone in school helped you decide, what kind of career that you should work toward? If yes who?
If not how did you decide?
- Who in the foster care system is helping you to achieve that goal? (Social workers, judges, GAL/CASA, Probation officer, counselor, foster parent) And how?
- DO YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL HELP TO ATTEND SCHOOL? If yes, from whom?

Life Skills Preparation

- Is anyone or has anyone taught you how to manage when you are on your own?
NOTE TO FACILITATOR - SUCH AS, SHOPPING, APT. HUNTING, LEASE NEGOTIATION, NUTRITION, BANKING, BUDGETING, CLEANING, COOKING, HEALTH CARE, JOB SEEKING, EDUCATION/TRAINING
- Do you think that these skills are important?
- DO YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL HELP TO PAY FOR HOUSING? If yes, from whom?
- FOR OVER 18 YR. OLDS – DO YOU RECEIVE MEDICAID TO PAY FOR HEALTH CARE?
- How much were you involved in the decisions made about you, while you were in care?

***MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

- During your time in care, what could have been done better for you, especially to help toward independence?
What would you recommend be done differently?
- IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU WANT US TO KNOW THAT WE DID NOT THINK TO ASK?
- WOULD ANY OF YOU BE WILLING TO TESTIFY IN FRONT OF A COMMITTEE THAT IS TRYING TO IMPROVE
WHAT IS AVAILABLE TO YOU? If yes, take contact information.

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Stakeholders' Questionnaire

- In your experience when do youth who will not be returned home or adopted begin to receive services that prepare them for independence
 1. Teach life skills such as goal setting, decision –making regarding: Health, Education. Or employment, budgeting, money management, apartment hunting, nutrition (food planning and purchasing), banking, home management, credit, negotiating a lease,
- Does the foster care system in this locality maintain youth in Foster care beyond age 18? What is maximum age?
- What are the requirements for youth in care after age 18
 1. Completing high school
 2. Post high school
 3. Job Corp
 4. Vocational training
 5. Special needs (emotional, physical)
- Is there local legislation or expectation that youth be attached to or supported by a significant adult?
- What is the role of the court as youth transition? Is there a plan that the court monitors? (6 month reviews)
- What benefit/services do youth receive toward education completion, employment preparation, medical care, housing subsidies – how long
- Are youth eligible for Medicaid after age 18 if they are not in care, but are receiving aftercare services?
- Is there any local legislation that addresses the needs of this group of young people? (Existing or proposed)
- Are there any collaborations (education, employment services, health) that specifically address the needs of these youth? If yes, what and the outcomes.
- What do you feel are the greatest obstacles facing youth in foster care?
- What would you recommend be changed or added to contribute to more positive transition to adulthood?

What should I have asked that you would want me to know?

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Youth Survey Form

Age	Under 15	15 –17	18 –20	20+		
Today you live	Group Home	Foster Family	RTC	Emergency Shelter	With Relative	On Your Own
Ever Been Homeless	YES	NO	1 – 3 Nights	4 – 7 Nights	More than a week	Other
In School	YES	NO	Middle School	High School	Quit	Other
Finished High School	YES	NO	GED	Will Finish This Year	Will Finish Next Year	Other
In Technical/Vocational School	YES	NO	Completed	Will Finish This Year	Will Finish Next Year	Other
In College	YES	NO	Community College	Four Year College	Completed	
Visits with Brothers/Sisters	YES	NO	Sometimes	No BRO/SIS		
Contact with Relatives	YES	NO				
After care will live with Relatives	YES	NO	Uncertain	Other Specify		
Employed	YES	NO	Full Time	Part Time		
Time in Care	Under 1 year	1 - 3 years	4 - 6 years	6 - 8 years	8+ years	Never in Care

Please check all that apply
Thank You

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Appendix D

Listening Session Summary: Brooklyn, NY

Preparing Young Black Males in The Foster Care System For Productive and Meaningful Adult Lives

Summary of Listening Session at mercyFirst Brooklyn, New York June 2007

Prepared by Kevin Powell ²⁰⁵

I. Overview

In June 2007, Father's Day Weekend (Friday, June 15 thru Sunday, June 17), I produced and convened Black and Male in America—A 3-Day National Conference, in Brooklyn, New York. The expressed goal of BAMIA was to present proactive and holistic solutions for Black male development and empowerment. Over 3,000 joined the gathering, from across America, and 90% of the speakers, presenters, workshop facilitators, including notable voices, leaders, and thinkers like Hill Harper, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Jeff Johnson, and Dr. Jelani Cobb, were either under 40, or, in the case of Dr. Dyson, individuals who could speak directly to the numerous Black boys and young Black males present at the conference. The result was, as I was told by many participants, the most accessible and engaging conference they'd ever gone to or, for the many younger first-timers, they were given the sense that their lives and their voices matter.

Why this approach? It is incredibly evident, as indicated by the New York Times front page stories of the crisis afflicting Black males, by the Washington Post's recent year-long series on the many challenges we face, to all the forums, summits, think tanks, etc., that have been operating throughout this first decade of the twenty-first century, that if we who care about these Black males, these young Black males, do not begin to come up with twenty-first remedies for these twenty-first century problems, we are doomed, I feel, to losing an entire generation of Black boys and young

Black men to more gun violence, to more trips to jails and prisons, to more affiliations with gangs and street organizations, to more failures in the public school system, to more despair, hopelessness, and a harsh reality, very prevalent, that death is one of the few options they have.

That is why we made it a point to do outreach to the most vulnerable Black boys and young Black men as put together BAMIA. That meant outreach to hip hoppers, athletes, gang members, Black males who had no fathers, and boys who were, and are, in the foster care system.

In what is the beginning of extensive work between my team of activists, mentors, and life coaches, and mercyFirst, a Brooklyn-based foster care program founded by the Sisters of Mercy as sister orphanages, I had an incredible listening session that covered several hours and a range of hopes, concerns, fears, and needs for the four Black boys present. Ms. Marvette Reid, the Program Director, set up the session for me, and initially we were going to have 25-30 boys in total. But we ultimately decided to make it a small circle so that there could be a very focused conversation for this initial session. Also, Ms. Reid was not present as I spoke with and listened to these young males because she felt the males should do something we do not often do in this society: talk amongst ourselves.

II. The Session

The session was held in the conference room of mercyFirst's downtown Brooklyn offices, where the boys come every week from their foster care homes for free subway passes, tutorial services, job training, and job placement. What is striking about the staff of mercyFirst is that it is 99% women-led, mostly Black and Latino females, with just one very visible Black male counselor. It is said to me several times upon my arrival "We really need more men to deal with and relate to these boys." I feel there is no need to cite statistics in this report because they have been well detailed locally and nationally. But it is clear these young males, as Ms. Reid stressed to me, face a laundry list of challenges. They include:

1. The overwhelming influence of the Bloods gang in New York City
2. Overcrowded and grossly underfunded public schools where many of them are testing well below grade level

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3. Broken family structures, and especially the absence of biological fathers, or older males, regardless of relationship, who can offer more positive and proactive examples of manhood
4. The profound and nonstop influence of the hip-hop industry, the multimillion dollar global culture I too came of age with; which now, more often than not, pushes the most destructive and stereotypical notions of manhood, including sexism and hatred of females; self-hatred rooted in the constant use of the word “nigga”; excessive materialism; severe anti-intellectualism; and various forms of addictions, including addictions to sex, violence, hand-held tech devices, and so on.

All of this and more were present when I began engaging the four boys in attendance:

Camillo, age 13
Devante, age 15
Donovan, age 15
Chris, age 16

Because of their ages, we chose not to videotape nor audiotape the session, nor are we able to give their last names. I began the session with an ice-breaker about my own life, as I always do. It is my belief that young people of today are not going to connect with speakers, workshop facilitators, life coaches, or whatever terms we choose to use, if those young people cannot relate to us on the most basic levels, if we do not appear to be human, and real, to them. Beyond that, there has to be a working knowledge, on the part of that adult presenter, of the lives of young people today. We cannot step to the table condemning their music, their culture, their language, their style of dress, their attitudes, because they will turn their ears off after the first few words. This is how it was for me as a youth, and it is even much more the case in the new millennium. As the young men chomped on free pizza and sandwiches, and downed soda, juice, or water, I revealed that I too was the creation of a disjointed family, having grown up the product of a single-mother led household, incredibly poor, in the worst kind of apartment dwellings imaginable (filled with roaches and rats). On top of all of that, I told the boys, my mother and my father never married, and after my eighth birthday I never saw him again, thirty-plus years ago. I could sense that I had instantly clicked with the boys, as they listened

intently. I went on to talk at length about hip-hop culture, about how education was the one thing that saved my life, in spite of my destitute and violence-filled childhood and adolescence. That although I had never been in the foster care system, I could basically identify with all the challenges they face today, for they are virtually the same as when I was a youth in the 1980s.

Once I got the preliminaries out of the way, I did what I always do in listening sessions with young people. I turned it over to them to talk, freely, in any way they felt comfortable:

A. Camillo

Camillo is by far one of the oldest 13-year-olds I’ve ever met. Short, stocky, with slightly slanted eyes that hint at Chinese blood mixed with African blood, Camillo is a native of Trinidad and Tobago. He has already been a drug trafficker, held guns and stopped at gunpoint by police, knocked a peer down a flight of stairs, and abandoned by his father and his mother. When I asked Camillo if he thought he had a bad temper, his immediate reaction was “No.” But then he paused and thought about it, and realized, clearly, he did. All of the males present confessed to such, that they felt they were under constant pressure, that no one cared about their lives. Camillo’s one passion in life is poetry. He writes love poems. When he found out I was a writer, that I had published seven books, his body language was transformed and he became a boy again instead of that hardened young Black teenager. Camillo read one piece aloud to us, even as the others boys snickered and said the poem was “mad corny.” No matter, Camillo was proud of his piece, proclaimed that he was writing a book, and asked me several times if I could help get him published. Moreover, in spite of his father splitting on him, Camillo mentioned several times how much he missed his father. He misses his mother, too, but the father longing was raw, unfiltered, and you sense a deep hurt where his father once was.

B. Devante

Devante is the hyperkinetic playboy of the group. Tall, lanky, with an infectious smile, and a serious swagger, he too was born in Trinidad and Tobago, although he has been in the United States far longer than Camillo, and is very clearly “Americanized.” For Devante talked nonstop about money, girls, sex, more sex, then more sex, and he asked me all kinds of celebrity questions, as if I knew all the stars he admires. Part of this inquisitiveness, for sure, is because

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I have worked in the entertainment industry for nearly two decades and did mention some of the folks I've interviewed through the years, like the late Tupac Shakur. Regardless, Devante's literal worship of sex suggests that he has engaged already. I didn't even ask that question. I asked, instead, if he was protecting himself. Devante smiles slyly and says "Yeah, man." But then he goes on and on about how he wants to have a child, in spite of his only being age 15. I ask Devante if he understands that young people, especially young people of color, are now the fastest-growing population of HIV-positive folks? Devante hears me but does not really hear, even as the other boys chime in and say, "Yeah, we knew that." They may know, Devante may know, but I didn't get the impression that that death sentence possibility is really registering with him. Or how he would perpetuate a cycle of poverty and misery if he were to have a child while he was still a child himself—and one in the foster care system no less.

Devante is also a member of the Blood gang, as he flashed hand signs throughout the session, partly to show off, and partly because he thought it would bother me, especially after I asked him and the other boys to stop using the word "nigga" for these few hours together. Devante said he joined the gang when he was "young," like 10-years-old or so. I asked why he was still in it, and he could not really answer. He simply said he did not know. The one thing Devante did know is that he wants to make a lot of money. He mentioned college, vaguely, but was not really clear what he wanted to do with his life.

C. Donovan

Donovan, all 15 years and under five feet five of him, showed up an hour late, and completely disrupted the session. His attention span was that of a pre-schooler. Donovan gave me the usual street handshake (what we call "a pound"), walked around the conference room table eyeing the food, then sat down quickly and dug in. Donovan spoke out of turn, his eyes darted nonstop around the room, he asked several times what the hour was, mentioning, again and again, that he had somewhere else to go. Donovan was very obviously hungry and had only come because Ms. Reid mentioned free food as a bonus for being at the listening session.

I would learn later that Donovan could only read on a second-grade level, although he had just been promoted to

the 10th grade. Like so many urban youth I've encountered around the country in similar sessions (and there is always at least one in the bunch), Donovan said he wanted to go into the music industry. At least he wants to be a producer instead of a rapper like most young Black males from ghetto environments. But Donovan could not tell me what kind of studio equipment he uses, he knew nothing of Black music history, and said, matter of factly, "It don't matter, 'cuz I'm abouts to get paid." Yes, money, was the recurring theme in the session, but only one young man, Devante, even had a bank account. I use the dialogue with Donovan as an opportunity to talk about having a plan for life, of the importance of accumulating, as often as possible, work/job/career skills, and of learning the difference between materialism and taking care of one's material well-being. This of course brought us back to a conversation around hip-hop, and the images we are bombarded with on a daily. Anyone who feels that pop cultural images of today do not affect young people in a very perverse way is someone who has never spent significant time with young people. These boys could recite any rap lyric, knew the lives and lifestyles of famous people inside out, but could not even begin to tell me about the neighborhoods in which they lived.

The tragedy with Donovan is that he knows he can barely read or write, he knows he is headed into a brick wall, but he lacks the self-esteem and the motivation to turn his own life around. For sure, life is a big joke, and I don't think it ironic that Donovan laughed nonstop, in a nervous, off-centered kind of way, as if all that laughter was a way to keep from crying about the trajectory of his life to date.

D. Chris

Chris, at 16, is the oldest and the quietest member of the group. He resembles the pop singer Usher a great deal in style and demeanor, except that Chris is a darker complexion. He wears large fake diamond studs in both ears, he sits up straight, and he just listens. When Chris does speak, it is just slightly above a whisper, and I have to ask him to speak up several times. But when Chris does talk, it is about his life passion: "I want to work with animals. I love watching the Animal Channel and the Discovery Channel, nahmean? I especially love studying about sharks and whales, and animals like that." Out of the four boys present, Chris is the only one completely clear, already, what he wants to do with his life. He has a plan, he loves to read and study, and, as he stated, he tries to stay out of trouble.

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Chris gave me the opportunity to talk, once more, about life choices in the face of great obstacles, how we do not have to turn to violence, to crime, to suicidal actions and tendencies, or wind up in the criminal justice system just because that is our environment. Indeed, the boys became the most engaged with each other as Chris rattled off a myriad of facts about sea life. That said to me that these boys do want to learn, they do want to grow, but part of that education and development will have to do with them being active agents in it themselves, with them being teachers themselves.

III. Conclusions/Recommendations

There are a few obvious things that came from this first listening session with these Black boys of the mercyFirst foster care program:

1. All the boys all agreed that if they did not have the foster care system, if someone had not taken them in, they would either be out on the streets of New York City surviving, hustling, or they would already be dead, or on their way to death.
2. All the boys had serious self-esteem and self-worth issues that have yet to be addressed. It was evident in their inability to make eye contact with me or each other for long periods of time. It was evident in their incredible lack of knowledge of who they are historically, culturally, and socially, as Black males on this planet (I ran off a litany of Black historical figures, for example, and they barely even know, of the entire list, who Malcolm X or Marcus Garvey were, although there are streets named after those figures right in these boys' neighborhoods).
3. All these boys, in spite of what the foster care system is doing for them, need more structure and another layer of support in their lives. And that support needs to come from Black male adults, be they teachers, coaches, or mentors who volunteer their time to speak with and listen to and engage these foster care Black boys. The number one reason why so many Black boys hit the streets, join gangs, become criminals and murderers, besides economics, is that constant search for camaraderie among other males. Destructive as some of these practices are, they

are, nevertheless, a bonding ritual known to Black males across America.

Suffice to say, I was drained when the session was over. After spending several minutes debriefing Ms. Reid about what I gleaned from the boys, I took a long walk to download the session. I thought about the fact that all the boys asked me if I was coming (yes, I definitely am, as a volunteer), if I was going to bring anyone else with me the next time. That says to me that in spite of them appearing not to listen at times, to me, that these boys, deep in the marrow of their bones, truly appreciated someone, a male figure who looked like them, taking the time to be with them.

From that session and the Black male conference, too, is going to come a very serious mentoring program begun by young professional Black males like myself in Brooklyn. One of the things I learned from this involvement with the foster care boys is this: they are a grossly forgotten segment of an already under crisis community. And that the only way they will be able to channel their lives from foster care to being purpose-driven and grounded adults who stay away from things like the criminal justice system is if there is significant and constant intervention in their lives. Anything less would be our society letting these young males down completely.

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Endnotes

Executive Summary

1. Although a total of 72 males participated in the three listening sessions, demographic data for 67 males are reported in Chart 3 in Chapter III. Five youth in Jacksonville attended the listening session but did not complete the Youth Survey Form, as requested.

Introduction

2. The characterization of Johnny is based on the performance of "Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune" at the Arena Stage, Washington, DC, between February 23 and April 8, 2007. The play was originally produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club on June 2, 1987.

3. Kids are Waiting: Fix Foster Care Now and the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative for The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own*, 2007, Available at: <http://kidsarewaiting.org/reports/files/AgingOut.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007)

4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau, *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2005 Estimates as of September 2006*, Available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report13.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007), 1-4.

5. Bureau of the Census, Population Division. "Table 3: Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006 (NC-EST2006-03)", Available at: <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2006-srh.html> (accessed July 6, 2007).

6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *AFCARS Report*, 1-4.

7. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Table 3.

8. A listening session is a facilitated small-group discussion whose purpose is to elicit the feelings, experiences, and opinions of participants.

Chapter I

9. Ralph J. DiClemente et al., "Parental Monitoring: Association With Adolescents' Risk Behaviors," *Pediatrics* 107 (2001): 1363-1368; and Lise M. Youngblade et al., "Risk and Promotive Factors in Families, Schools, and Communities: A Contextual Model of Positive Youth Development in Adolescence," *Pediatrics* 119 (2007): S47-53.

10. Aging out of foster care is defined as leaving foster care after the age of majority and no longer being a ward of the state. The age of majority varies by state but generally falls between ages 18 and 21. [Mark Courtney, "Youth Aging Out of Foster Care," *Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief*, Issue 19 (April 2005), Available at: <http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu/downloads/courtney--foster%20care.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).]

11. Robert B. Hill, *Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality in Child Welfare: An Update*, October 2006, Available at: http://www.racemattersconsortium.org/docs/BobHillPaper_FINAL.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007).

12. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *AFCARS Report*, 1-4.

13. Hill, 15.

14. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report*, Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo03/cwo03.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007), VI-73, VI-74, VI-105, VI-106, VI-353, and VI-354.

15. Dorothy Roberts, *Racial Disproportionality in the U.S. Child Welfare System: Documentation, Research on Causes, and Promising Practices*, (Chicago: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Northwestern University School of Law, Institute for Policy Research, August 2002), 4.

16. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *AFCARS Report*, 1.

17. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *AFCARS Report*, 4.

18. Courtney, 1-2.

19. Sonya J. Leathers and Mark F. Testa, "Foster Youth Emancipating from Care: Caseworkers' Reports on Needs and Services," *Child Welfare* 85 (2006), 476.

20. Leathers and Testa, 477.

21. Leathers and Testa, 493.

22. Eve Malakoff-Klein and Julie Gwin, eds., *CWLA Standards of Excellence for Transition, Independent Living and Self-Sufficiency Services* (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2005), 11.

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23. Abigail English, Madlyn C. Morreale, and Judith Larsen, "Access to Health Care for Youth Leaving Foster Care: Medicaid and SCHIP," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 32 (2003), 56.
24. Jeffrey S. Harman, George E. Childs, and Kelly J. Kelleher, "Mental Health Care Utilization and Expenditures by Children in Foster Care," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 154 (2000), 1114-7.
25. Janet Max and Pat Paluzzi, *Summary Report: Promoting Successful Transition from Foster/Group Home Settings to Independent Living Among Pregnant and Parenting Teens*, (Washington, DC: Healthy Teen Network, November 2005), 3-4.
26. Leathers and Testa, 492.
27. As entitlements, these funds are not subject to the regular legislative appropriations process.
28. For additional information, see "Child Welfare," a fact sheet developed by the National Governors Association, at <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/welfareCW.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
29. See http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/1987/pi8701.htm (accessed July 6, 2007). See also http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/pi9316.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
30. National Governors Association, "Child Welfare," Available at <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/welfareCW.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
31. See http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/1987/pi8701.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
32. National Indian Child Welfare Association, "Summary of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999: Congress Approves Independent Living Program Expansion," Available at http://www.nicwa.org/policy/law/foster/PL106-169_summary.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007).
33. Table is taken from: MaryLee Allen et al., *Frequently Asked Questions About the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program*, (National Foster Care Awareness Project, February 2000), Available at: http://www.njacyf.org/main/pdf/faq_feb.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007), 12-13.
34. Michelle-Marie Mendez and Frank Vandervort, "The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program," Available at http://www.ssw.umich.edu/tpcws/articles/fcia_chafee.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007), 3.
35. "Chafee National Youth in Transition Database, Proposed Rule." *Federal Register* 71 (14 July 2006), Available at: <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/06-6005.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007), 40346-40382.
36. See http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/0603a4.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
37. See http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2007/pi0705a4.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
38. Michelle L. Kessler, "Educating Youth In Care: The First Year of Education and Training Vouchers," (Tulsa, OK: National Resource Center for Youth Development, 2004), Available at: <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/ycd/resources/publications/monographs/etv.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
39. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau. "Fact Sheet: Transitional Living Program for Older Homeless Youth," Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/programs/tlpfactsheet.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
40. The FYSB is part of the Administration on Children & Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
41. See <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d106:s.00249> (accessed July 6, 2007).
42. See <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/programs/tlpfactsheet.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
43. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development, "Transitional Living Program (TLP)," Available at <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/ycd/programs/tlp.html> (accessed July 6, 2007).
44. See <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/youthdivision/programs/tlpfactsheet.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
45. Sonali Patel and Martha A. Roherty, *Medicaid Access for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care*, (Washington, DC: American Public Human Services Association, 2007), Available at: <http://www.aphsa.org/Home/Doc/Medicaid-Access-for-Youth-Aging-Out-of-Foster-Care-Rpt.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).

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46. Vernon Smith et al., *SCHIP Turns 10: An Update on Enrollment and the Outlook on Reauthorization from the Program's Directors*, (Washington, DC: Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, 2007), Available at: <http://www.kff.org/medicaid/upload/7642.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
47. Donna Cohen Ross, Laura Cox, and Caryn Marks, *Resuming the Path to Health Coverage for Children and Parents: A 50 State Update on Eligibility Rules, Enrollment and Renewal Procedures, and Cost-Sharing Practices in Medicaid and SCHIP in 2006*, (Washington, DC: Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, 2007). Available at: <http://www.kff.org/medicaid/upload/7608.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
48. See http://dhs.phila.gov/intranet/pgintrahome_pub.nsf/Content/Adoption+-+AIC (accessed July 6, 2007).
49. See <http://www.aiphilly.com/aicpage1.aspx?pagelid=hospitality> (accessed July 6, 2007).
50. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, "Chapter 8" in Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, *FFY 2006 Annual Progress and Services Report*, 9.
51. See <http://www.communityconnect.org/page.asp?page=247> (accessed July 6, 2007).
52. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/State_Plan/2006_Progress_Report/2006_Section_VIA.asp (accessed July 6, 2007). See also: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/chafee.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
53. Information was obtained from Ms. Vicky Coffee-Fletcher at the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services – Transitional Living Services Program (Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us).
54. See <http://www.cedu.niu.edu/ccwe/edaccess.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
55. Jim Adams, *2006 Report to our Community*, (Jacksonville, Florida: Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc., 2006), 17.
56. See http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/July05/story2_7_05.html (accessed July 6, 2007).
57. See http://www.hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social_services/child_welfare/ILP (accessed July 6, 2007).
58. See http://www.hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social_services/child_welfare/ILP (accessed July 6, 2007).
59. See http://www.chail.org/supervised_independent_living.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
60. See <http://www.hullhouse.org.cw/> (accessed July 6, 2007).
61. To view the documentary, go to <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/agingout/mystory/thomas.html> (accessed July 6, 2007).
62. See <http://www.hullhouse.org.cw/> (accessed July 6, 2007).
63. See <http://www.teenliving.org/perl/2/index.cgi> (accessed July 6, 2007).
64. See <http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/communities.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
65. See <http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/agingoutresources.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
66. See http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/July05/story2_7_05.html (accessed July 6, 2007).
67. See <http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/agingoutresources.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
68. See http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/c_srv/cserv_ind.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
69. See <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/publications/docs/iv-bfunding.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).
70. See <http://www.cdm-hope.org/trac/index.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
71. See <http://www.ncfy.com/publications/guide/bap.htm> (accessed July 6, 2007).
72. Ibid.

Chapter II

73. These percents sum to more than 100 because many respondents gave more than one answer to this question.
74. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *AFCARS Report*, 1-4.
75. The proportion of states in the West (with the exception of Hawaii for which data were not provided) that maintain youth in foster care until

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age 21 is 78.6 percent. Because the sample size for social workers who worked in the West was small, the proportion is not presented of social workers who believe that youth in this region are maintained in foster care until age 21.

76. For 2006 information about the maximum age to which youth can remain in foster care in various states, see the web site of the National Resource Center for Youth Services, The University of Oklahoma OUTREACH. Data are provided for all states except: Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Rhode Island, and Tennessee. Because three of the excluded states are in the South, the proportion reported for the South (91.6 percent) may be overstated. The web site is: http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yc/state_pages/search.php?search_option=remain_after_18 (accessed July 6, 2007).

77. Matched savings accounts are savings accounts established by youth in foster care for which states provide matching funds. Most commonly the match is either up to a certain dollar amount, or for funds saved for a specific purpose (such as to purchase a vehicle). Financial support for matched savings accounts for youth in foster care comes from the CFCIP and can be used for any of the following: program administration and operating costs of a matched savings program; the match itself; or the deposits to establish accounts. For additional information, see: James Nguyen, "SEED: Federal Chafee Funds and State Matched Savings Programs for Foster Youth," *CFED Policy and Practice Working Paper* Vol. 1, Issue 3, April 2007.

78. These percents sum to more than 100 because many respondents gave more than one answer to this question.

79. From Table 9 of: Jennifer Laird, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007), Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/dropout05/tables/table_09.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

80. Thomas R. Wolanin, *Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth: A Primer for Policymakers*, (Washington, DC: The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005), Available at: <http://www.ihep.org/Pubs/PDF/fosteryouth.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007).

81. Courtney, 1.

82. These percents sum to more than 100 because many respondents gave more than one answer to this question.

83. Mark E. Courtney et al., "Youth Who Run Away from Out-of-Home Care," *Issue Brief #103*, (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2005), Available at www.chapinhall.org (accessed July 6, 2007). See also Marni Finkelstein et al., *Youth Who Chronically AWOL From Foster*

Care: Why They Run, Where They Go, and What Can Be Done (New York City: Vera Institute of Justice, 2004).

Chapter III

84. See also Appendix D for a summary of a listening session conducted in Brooklyn, NY, in June 2007. The New York City listening session used a different methodology than the listening sessions described in this chapter and was conducted with four male youth in foster care.

85. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Child Welfare Outcomes*, VI-73, VI-74, VI-105, VI-106, VI-353, and VI-354.

86. For the percent of African American youth in foster care see: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau, *The AFCARS Report: Interim FY 2003 Estimates as of June 2006*, Available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report10.htm (accessed July 6, 2007). For the percent of African American children among all children younger than 18 years of age, see: Bureau of the Census, Population Division, "Table 3: Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006 (NC-EST2006-03)," Release Date: May 17, 2007, Available at: <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2006-srh.html> (accessed July 6, 2007).

87. Although 92 youth (29 in Florida, 41 in Texas, and 22 in Illinois) participated in listening sessions, we report a total of 87 participants. The difference of five results because five of the youth who participated in Florida did not complete youth survey forms, as requested.

88. Twenty-nine youth participated in the listening sessions in Florida, although only 24 completed survey forms and, thus, are counted here.

89. Column totals do not sum to the total of the youth for whom data are provided in each site and overall, because of double counting. For example, some of the youth may have checked both "In School" and "In College." Youth also may have checked both "Finished High School" and "In College." In addition, information about educational attainment for participants in the Chicago youth listening session is incomplete.

90. Kim Preston, "Optional Assistance Programs Available to Young Adults Who Age Out of Foster Care at Age 18," Available at: http://floridaschildrenfirst.org/04_reports/proj/Independent_Living/Trainings/2004_Feb_24/06_Kim_Materials_over_18_categories.doc (accessed July 6, 2007). See also Independent Living Services Advisory Council, "2006 Report of Independent Living Services for Florida's Foster Youth," Available at: http://www.eckerdfamilyfoundation.org/docs/ILSAC_2006report.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007), 11.

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91. Independent Living Services Advisory Council, 11.
92. For more information about the organization known as daniel, go to www.danielkids.org.
93. "Project Prepare," undated brochure prepared by daniel.
94. Florida uses its Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program funds for the Road-to-Independence Program.
95. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, "Improvements in Independent Living Services Will Better Assist State's Struggling Youth," (Report No. 05-61, December 2005), Available at: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0561rpt.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007), 7.
96. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 3.
97. "Florida Independent Living Requirements," Available at: <http://gal.fl.gov/documents/FloridaIndependentLivingRequirementsChart2.doc> (accessed July 6, 2007).
98. Independent Living Services Advisory Council, 11.
99. Although only 24 youth submitted youth survey forms, 29 youth participated in the Florida listening session and are included in this count.
100. A program with this goal—Transitional Support Services—has already been enacted. See discussion of Transitional Support Services made available in Florida.
101. Independent Living Services are mandated by Florida law for youth who are ages 13-18. Subsidized Independent Living Services are available to youth ages 16 and 17.
102. The issues noted represent the views of and the understanding by the stakeholders of the foster care system in Jacksonville, Florida, and in the state of Florida generally. The accuracy of statements made by the stakeholders has been verified, whenever possible.
103. Florida has extended until their 21st birthday Medicaid coverage for all youth formerly in foster care who receive the Road-to-Independence Scholarships. Other youth who have aged out of foster care are eligible for Medicaid coverage until their 20th birthday.
104. In Florida, monthly foster care maintenance payments range from \$429 to \$515 per child, depending on the age of the child. The payment rate for youth ages 13 and older is \$515 per month (approximately \$17/day). [National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work, "Foster Care Maintenance Payments," Updated 5/29/07, Available at: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/foster-care-maintenance-payments.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007)].
105. The One Church, One Child program is a national adoption program for racial/ethnic minority populations. Founded in Chicago in the early 1980s, the program had expanded nationally by the end of that decade.
106. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/chafee.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
107. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
108. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/State_Plan/2006_Progress_Report/2006_Section_VIA.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
109. Ibid.
110. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/etv.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
111. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Documents/Child_Protection/pdf/transitionalmedicaid.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007).
112. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/Rules/TAC_700/_700_316_32.htm (accessed July 6, 2007).
113. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
114. Purchase-of-services dollars are funds set aside by the DFPS to purchase goods and services from private providers, rather than for the DFPS to provide the services themselves.
115. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
116. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/youth_hotline/youth_tohelp.asp (accessed July 6, 2007). See also http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Run-away_Hotline/runaway.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).
117. Information was obtained from Ms. Vicky Coffee-Fletcher at the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services – Transitional Living Services Program (Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us).

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118. Ibid.

119. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

120. Ibid.

121. Information was obtained from Ms. Vicky Coffee-Fletcher at the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services – Transitional Living Services Program (Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us).

122. The issues noted here represent the views of and the understanding of the youth about the foster care system in Jacksonville, Florida. The accuracy of statements made by the youth has been verified, whenever possible.

123. In the state of Texas, at the age of 21, records of any crimes committed before age 17 are automatically placed on “restricted access,” which means that the youth may deny the existence of the juvenile record and deny that the arrest, prosecution, or adjudication ever happened. In other words once one’s juvenile records are on “restricted access,” one may legally answer “No” when asked on a job application, educational or occupational licensing application, “Have you ever been arrested, convicted, or adjudicated of a crime?” A juvenile criminal record will only be placed on “restricted access” if the youth has not committed additional crimes between the ages of 17 and 21. For additional information, see *Texas Juvenile Justice System Files and Records: A Parent and Child’s Guide to Understanding Automatic Restriction of Access to Records*, a publication by the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and the Texas Youth Commission, March 2003.

124. According to the most recent data (2004 and 2005), PAL services are made available to some Texas youth in foster care who are younger than age 16. In FY 2004, PAL services were provided to 534 youth ages 14 and 15, and to 5,341 youth ages 16-20. In FY 2005, these services were provided to 688 youth ages 14 and 15, and to 6,474 youth ages 16-20.

125. Life skills training is among the PAL services made available to some Texas youth who are younger than 16. See footnote 124.

126. For information about the “restricted access” policy for juvenile criminal records, see footnote 123.

127. For information about the One Church, One Child model, see footnote 105.

128. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 3-4.

129. Program description was provided by the Vice President of the Student Youth Advisory Board (Ashley Patterson, acpatte@yahoo.com) and the coordinator of the Student Youth Advisory Board (Antoine Turpeau, 312-663-3574).

130. See <http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/bp/independence/independence-05.php> (accessed July 6, 2007).

131. Program description was provided by the Vice President of the Student Youth Advisory Board (Ashley Patterson, acpatte@yahoo.com) and the coordinator of the Student Youth Advisory Board (Antoine Turpeau, 312-663-3574).

132. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 6-7.

133. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 30.

134. It is unclear which type of program support is referenced here.

135. The rules and regulations governing the Pregnant and/or Parenting Program operated by the DCFS for the pregnant and/or parenting youth for whom the Department is legally responsible both allow and encourage teen parents to remain in the placement they had before becoming a parent. For further information, see http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/procedures/procedures_302/homepage.phtml?page=36#P7_67 (accessed July 6, 2007).

136. Florida and Texas require that caregivers—relatives and foster parents alike—be licensed to be able to receive foster care stipends, the most generous assistance payments available to substitute parents. In Florida, though, aid from other sources (such as Florida’s Relative Caregiver Program) is available to unlicensed kin who are caregivers. In addition, in both Florida and Texas, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) money also is available to unlicensed kin caregivers. Under kinship care in the state of Illinois, however, unlicensed caregivers can receive foster care stipends. See <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/ess/tanf.shtml> (accessed July 6, 2007). See also Nancy Rolock and Mark F. Testa, *Conditions of Children in or at Risk of Foster Care in Illinois*, (Urbana, IL: School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Children and Family Research Center, 2006), Available at: <http://cfrwww.social.uiuc.edu/pubs/pdf.files/BHReport033006.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007) and Texas Department of Family and Corrective Services, “Kinship Manual,” Available at: http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/pdf/KinshipManualEnglish.pdf (accessed July 6, 2007).

Chapter IV

137. For a detailed discussion of the methods used in this project, see

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chapter I for the review of research and programs, chapter II for the survey findings, and chapter III for the findings from the listening sessions.

138. Hill, 15.

139. Although a total of 72 males participated in the three listening sessions, demographic data for 67 males are reported in Chart 3 in Chapter III. Five youth in Jacksonville attended the listening session but did not complete the Youth Survey Form, as requested.

140. Mary Bissell and Jennifer L. Miller, eds., *Using Subsidized Guardianship to Improve Outcomes for Children: Key Questions to Consider*, (Cornerstone and Children's Defense Fund, 2004), Available at: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/UsingSubsidizedGuardianship.pdf?docID=1521>, 39.

141. The Kinship Caregiver Support Act has been introduced this year in both the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2188) and the Senate (S.661). This legislation would provide assistance to relatives who become the legal guardians of children in foster care, to help put them on par with foster parents within the child welfare system.

142. Sharon K. Long, Teresa Coughlin, and Jennifer King, "How Well Does Medicaid Work in Improving Access to Care?" *Health Services Research* 40, no.1 (2005), 39-58.

143. For additional information, see Margo Rosenbach, Kimball Lewis, and Brian Quinn, *Health Conditions, Utilization, and Expenditures of Children in Foster Care*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000), Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/fostercare%2Dhealth00> (accessed July 6, 2007). See also Rob Geen, Anna S. Sommers, and Mindy Cohen, "Medicaid Spending on Foster Children," *Child Welfare Research Program, Brief No. 2* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, August 2005), Available at: <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311221> (accessed July 6, 2007).

144. Nitin Gogtay et al., "Dynamic Mapping of Human Cortical Development During Childhood Through Early Adulthood," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 101, no. 21 (2004), 8174-9.

145. This option was suggested by Janet Max of the Healthy Teen Network, during a conversation (on July 19, 2007) about aging out of foster care.

146. Courtney, 1-2.

147. Bissell and Miller, 41.

148. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago and the MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, *Conference Report: Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood: Rethinking Public Policy for a New Century*, (Philadelphia, PA: MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood, University of Pennsylvania, February 2005), 15.

149. See http://www.hawaii.gov/dhs/protection/social_services/child_welfare/ILP (accessed July 6, 2007).

150. Peter Edelman, Harry J. Holzer, and Paul Offner, *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*, (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2006), 68-69.

151. Edelman, Holzer, and Offner, 42.

152. This recommendation was made by youth in the Jacksonville listening session and by stakeholders in the listening sessions in both Jacksonville and Houston.

153. This recommendation was made by youth in all three listening sessions (Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago) and by the stakeholders in listening sessions in Houston and Chicago.

154. The One Church, One Child program is a national adoption program for racial/ethnic minority populations. Founded in Chicago in the early 1980s, the program had expanded nationally by the late 1980s. This recommendation was made by stakeholders in the listening sessions in Jacksonville and Houston.

155. Courtney, 1.

156. Courtney, 1.

157. Ibid.

158. Leathers and. Testa, 476.

159. This recommendation was made by youth in the Jacksonville listening session.

160. This recommendation was made by youth in all three listening sessions (Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago).

161. This recommendation was made by youth in all three listening sessions (Jacksonville, Houston, and Chicago).

162. Eve Malakoff-Klein and Julie Gwin, eds., *CWLA Standards of Excellence for Transition, Independent Living and Self-Sufficiency*

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Services (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2005), 11.

163. Harman JS, Childs GE, Kelleher KJ. "Mental Health Care Utilization and Expenditures by Children in Foster Care." *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med* 2000 Nov; 154(11): 1114-7.

164. Courtney, 1.

165. This recommendation came from the youth listening session in Houston.

166. These three recommendations came from the youth listening session in Houston.

167. We did not conduct a comprehensive review of existing foster care initiatives before making these recommendations. Thus, some of these recommendations already may be targeted for action by organizations such as the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, which recently has focused on youth transitioning out of foster care.

Appendix A

168. See http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo03/state_data/florida.htm:20-21 (accessed July 6, 2007).

169. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 2.

170. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 1.

171. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 7.

172. Florida Department of Children and Families, "FY 2005-2009 Florida Department of Children and Families Child and Family Services Plan: Chafee Foster Care Independence Program and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program," in: Florida Department of Children and Families, *Chafee Foster Care Independence Program 2005-2009 Application and 2004 Progress Report*, 11-18.

173. Florida Department of Children and Families, 11-13.

174. Go to <http://www.danielkids.org/sites/web/store/detail.cfm?CategoryID=11> to learn more about the youth development skills training established by Daniel Memorial, Inc., which is part of the life skills curriculum used.

175. Florida Department of Children and Families, 11-17.

176. See <http://www.danielkids.org/sites/web/store/detail.cfm?CategoryID=11> (accessed July 6, 2007).

177. Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 2-5.

178. Independent Living Services Advisory Council, 4.

179. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

180. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/chafee.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

181. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/State_Plan/2006_Progress_Report/2006_Section_VIA.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

182. Information was obtained from Ms. Vicky Coffee-Fletcher at the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services – Transitional Living Services Program (Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us). Data for 14- and 15-year-olds were not provided.

183. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

186. Information was obtained from Ms. Vicky Coffee-Fletcher at the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services – Transitional Living Services Program (Vicky.coffee-fletcher@dfps.state.tx.us.)

187. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

188. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/chafee.asp (accessed July 6, 2007). See also Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the DFPS Youth Leadership Committee, "Texas Foster Care Handbook for Youth," (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, May 2004), Available at http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Documents/Child_Protection/pdf/foster-care-handbook.pdf: 19, (accessed July 6, 2007).

189. See http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp (accessed July 6, 2007).

190. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1.

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191. The number of youth in foster care in Illinois in 2006 was reported as 19,057 (on 12/6/06) by the Illinois DCFS Division of Service Intervention. The *FFY 2006 Annual Progress and Services Report* indicates that the number of children in foster care in the state in FY2006 was 17,500.

192. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 1, 41-43.

193. Children and Family Research Center. "Youth in Transition," School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Available at: <http://cfrwww.social.uiuc.edu/briefpdfs/Youth%20In%20Transition%2012-03.pdf>; 1, Date accessed: 7/6/07.

194. Mark F. Testa, Leslie Cohen, and Grace Smith, *Subsidized Guardianship Waiver Demonstration: Final Evaluation Report*, (Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, July 2003), Available at: <http://cfrwww.social.uiuc.edu/pubs/Pdf.files/sgfinalreport.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2007), 18.

195. Testa et al., 18.

196. John Poertner and Philip Garnier, *Report on Child Safety and Permanency in Illinois for Fiscal Year 2000*, (Urbana, IL: Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 2001), 1-12.

197. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 45-46.

198. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 44-46.

199. See <http://www.Caseylifeskills.org> (accessed July 6, 2007).

200. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 24.

201. Patel & Roherty, 24.

202. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 4.

203. Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 6,7,12.

Appendix C

204. Although 29 youth participated in the Jacksonville listening sessions, only 24 submitted the Youth Survey form, as requested.

Appendix D

205. Kevin Powell is a Brooklyn-based community organizer and writer.



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